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# A Study of High School Teachers' Experiences of the Phenomenon of Effective Instructional Leadership

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A STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF THE  
PHENOMENON OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

BY

CHERI A. GUERRA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

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AND

RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

2014

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION  
OF  
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2014

## ABSTRACT

Instructional leadership is focused on elevating teaching and learning for the purpose of improved student achievement (King, 2002). There are many styles of school leadership represented in educational leadership research, yet there is not an abundance of research on high school teachers' perspectives regarding instructional leadership. The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership through teachers' experiences. Using six core practices of effective instructional leadership as the frame for the phenomenological study, eight teachers were interviewed from two high schools in two school districts in Rhode Island. Four teachers from each school shared their experiences and provided details about what they understood to be an effective instructional leader through one-on-one interviews. Using transcendental phenomenology as the methodology to analyze the interview data, I compared and contrasted the findings of teachers at both high schools. My conceptual framework was based primarily on the works of Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, and Orr (2010) and Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008). I analyzed the data by developing structural and textural themes to examine the teachers' experiences in describing the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership. The result of this study is a composite textural-structural description of the essence of the core practices that embody effective instructional, school leadership. The study focuses on how the teachers have made sense of and understood the practices of instructional leaders. The major core essence is building interpersonal skills with teachers through setting goals, establishing open communication, and

building trust. This study offers a unique view into teachers' lived experiences and perspective of effective instructional leadership.

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Mom, Dad, and Matthew: Where would I be if it weren't for your support, swift kicks, and endless encouragement? Your support and love are what carried me through this process from start to finish. I have tried your patience year after year, yet your enthusiasm never faltered. I am forever grateful.

## DEDICATION

*I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Charlene Anne, who has always been a rock.*

*Thank you for pushing me to achieve and move beyond my comfort zone. You are a  
continual source of inspiration.*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Instructional leadership is summarized as engaging in improving teaching and learning for the purpose of improved student achievement (King, 2002). Teachers work alongside school principals to develop curriculum, set school goals, discuss evaluation feedback, or analyze student data (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Yet, while teachers deliver instruction to students in the classroom, the school leader guides the improvement of instruction for the entire school (Elmore, 1999). In my experience as an educator, there has been a strong undercurrent of frustration among teachers with a lack of instructional leadership. With so many styles of school leadership represented in educational research, there is not an abundance of research on high school teachers' perspectives regarding instructional leadership. "We cannot know what effective instructional leadership means unless and until we include stakeholders' perspectives and their construction of leadership" (Southworth, 2002, p. 74). Since instructional leadership is a key to school leadership, it is important to focus on the concept and describe what it looks like in different contexts (Southworth, 2002). There has been little research seeking to understand how and in what ways the key stakeholders view effective school leadership (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012). It is

through this lens I will conduct a qualitative study to examine teachers' experiences with the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership practices.

### **Personal Connection to the Study**

Lack of perceived instructional leadership is an inspiration for this study as I was curious to see teachers' perceived instructional leadership. Understanding teachers' experiences of effective instructional leadership allows for insight into how well a principal is getting his/her message across; or actually utilizing and communicating instructional leadership qualities. My purpose is to gain insight into effective instructional leadership through teachers' descriptions of their experiences.

Instructional leaders, namely school principals, wear many hats in their day-to-day activities. They face a myriad of expectations from different perspectives: department of education, district-leaders, teachers, students, families, and the community.

How do teachers experience effective instructional leadership and how do they internalize it? As an administrator with experience at both the middle and high school levels of public education, I have an interest in how instructional leadership manifests in schools. My journey from teacher to school administrator has lead me to inquire about teachers' experiences with instructional leadership, as they have worked with different administrators over time, and the ways instructional leadership has made an impact on them. The expectations for my role as an administrator are to guide teachers on evaluation, data analysis, professional development, curriculum, assessment, and instruction. I have served as an assistant principal with an array of school leaders with varied training in educational leadership and varying levels of

understanding and implementation of instructional leadership practices with their teachers. Further, part of my work as a school administrator requires working directly with teachers to enhance and support their teaching, encourage reflection on the use of teaching strategies, develop effective methods to address struggling learners, and redesign curriculum and assessments aligned to standards. Hence, through this study, I seek to understand how teachers experience instructional leadership.

The core of the study is to learn about and obtain information regarding teachers' perceptions and experiences of effective instructional leadership. I believe teachers are the key stakeholders in a school building and work most closely with school leaders, particularly building-level school leaders. I expect that the teachers will share an honest, accurate, and detailed portrayal of what occurs with instructional leadership.

In what ways do principals exhibit the six core practices of effective instructional leadership outlined by Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) and Leithwood, et al. (2008)? How do the instructional leaders exhibit these practices at their schools? How do the teachers, as research participants, view the instructional leaders as being effective? Managing the building and providing instructional support have little in common, yet both require skills in building relationships and working together to accomplish a goal of increasing and improving student learning. My hope is to learn what teachers have to say about their experiences with the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership to better understand how teachers make sense of effective instructional leadership. Further, this study will compare teachers' experiences at two

high schools to six core practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008) of effective instructional leadership.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Question**

In an effort to better understand the instructional aspect of school leadership and the effective core practices associated with it, this study examines teachers' perceptions and experiences with the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership. Through interviews, I obtained rich descriptions and lived experiences of teachers at two high schools in two urban-ring school districts, in Rhode Island. In light of the focus of this study, the following question guided my research: What is the nature of high school teachers' lived experiences with school leaders demonstrating effective instructional leadership practices? In what ways do teachers identify what it means to be an effective instructional leader in comparison to the literature? Teachers will note what they perceive and have experienced to be effective with relation to instructional leadership practices through providing examples and experiences. Transcendental phenomenology has been selected as the best methodology to capture teachers' experiences as it requires the collection of firsthand information from teachers through interviews. The result of this study is a synthesis of themes, textural and structural descriptions, comparisons of how instructional leadership is experienced by teachers, and core practices of instructional leadership via literature review.

### **Significance of the Study**

To better understand the phenomenon of how effective instructional leadership is experienced, the goal of this study is to describe the core practices of instructional



leadership from the lived experiences of teachers at two high schools. This qualitative study utilizes transcendental phenomenology to discover those experiences, how they compare and/or contrast to one another and how they may be in contrast to or alignment with that which researchers have reported. The data collected, through interviews, from teachers' perceptions, observations, and experiences provide the foundation for this study. Teachers' stories will add a layer to the existing literature on instructional leadership. The themes present in the findings will make a contribution to the field of educational leadership at the secondary level by highlighting the ways current, effective instructional leadership practices occur in two high schools in Rhode Island. To gain a deeper understanding of the actual goings-on at two high schools, these teachers' experiences may be utilized for future research relevant to school leaders' behaviors and capacity for instructional leadership. Teachers have been selected as the research participants because they do not possess the same inherent bias as a principal would when describing instructional leadership practices. Further, teachers have firsthand experience with instructional leadership and it is essential to obtain those experiences in this type of format, a phenomenology study.

This study may be useful for district-level administrators to develop effective principals by “communicating explicit expectations for principal leadership and providing learning experiences in line with those expectations” (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010, p. 21). Colleges and universities may find the work of this study useful for developing or revising programs for principal training. State departments of education may consider the results for developing certification and

licensure regulations for educational leadership. Additionally, aspiring and current principals may use this study to frame their personal philosophy of education in leading a school. My hope is for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to thoughtfully consider actual instructional leadership practices from the experiences of teachers in schools and the implications of those practices for the purpose of school improvement.

A consideration for district-level administrators is to provide professional development to building-level instructional leaders in “curriculum design, developing a mission and vision, and the necessary effective organizational behaviors” (Glatthorn, 1997, p. 39). “Meaningful changes take place at the school level” (Glatthorn, 1997, p. 22) hence there is a need for ongoing leadership training for building-level leaders. Such skills can be reinforced, developed/maintained, and sustained through professional development from district-level administration, college programs and in the form of strong policies established for certification of school leadership to prepare them for real-world experiences of instructional leadership at the secondary school level, and ensure readiness and preparedness.

The foundation and core for this study are teachers’ experiences. Teachers have direct contact with building-level instructional leaders, often principals. I seek to highlight and give voice to teachers to better understand school leaders’ abilities/behaviors in exhibiting effective instructional leadership practices. Using transcendental phenomenology allows teachers to share their experiences freely without the limitation of a survey, for example. Through in-depth interviews, teachers are free to share anecdotes, personal experiences, and other rich descriptions, as they

know them. From the interviews, teachers' descriptions provide data to compare the how effective instructional leadership is experienced in the two high schools and literature on the core practices of effective instructional leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). My aim is to learn about how research participants define and give meaning to the term "effective." In an effort to minimize my bias, I have not operationalized the term "effective" for the participants. Instead, I seek to obtain their understanding and experiences with effective instructional leadership rather than influence their thinking by providing a definition.

Phenomenology is the most appropriate methodology for this study, as it will best uncover/emphasize the nature of the teachers' experiences with effective instructional leadership. I expect these experiences to pinpoint how teachers, the research participants, note examples of their principals' demonstrating the six core practices of effective instructional leadership. The six core practices include motivating for change, designing and modifying curriculum, providing professional development to teachers, analyzing school and student data, collaboration, and providing feedback to teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). My findings "explore teachers' perspectives on principals' instructionally-oriented behaviors and interactions" (Blase & Blase, 1998a, pp. 6-7) and how they compare to the practices at the two different high schools. This study reports actual experiences of teachers through the use of in-depth interviews. A solid research base exists on the core practices of instructional leadership. Effective instructional leadership is defined in many ways with researchers ultimately settling on a core set of

attributes to represent it. This study delves into how the six core practices have been experienced by teachers in the two different high schools in Rhode Island.

### **Definition of Terms**

*CCSS: Common Core State Standards*

*CPT: Common Planning Time*

*GSE: Grade Span Expectations*

*NECAP: New England Common Assessment Program*

*PARCC: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career*

*RTTT: Race to the Top*

*SLO: Student Learning Objective*

*Urban-ring school district:* “An urban-ring community contains populations of between 20,000 and 100,000 residents and student poverty rates between 25 percent and 50 percent” (Magee, 2014).

### **Summary of the Study**

In Chapter One, I provide an introduction and overview of the core practices of instructional leadership. I introduce the problem of obtaining an understanding of teachers’ experiences with the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership in schools. The chapter contains a few key terms used in the study.

In Chapter Two, I review the literature on school leadership, then delve into the definitions and research on instructional leadership. Namely, I identify six core practices of effective instructional leadership. I explore research from the perspectives of instructional leadership and curriculum leadership to frame the study. In Chapter Three, I outline the research design of the study detailing my approach to utilizing

transcendental phenomenology as the methodology for data collection and analysis.

Next, in Chapter Four, I present the findings as reported by the research participants.

Lastly, in Chapter Five, I compare and contrast the findings from the two sets of teachers, then discuss the implications of the findings and made suggestions for future research to explore additional aspects of instructional leadership.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Introduction to School Leadership**

A principal's role has evolved from manager of the building to that of a change agent (Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead, & Boschee, 2012). The principal has his/her hand in staff development, building relationships with staff and the school community and building a sense of community to having clearly delineated goals and expectations (Glatthorn et al., 2012). Having an understanding and knowledge of curriculum theory is a key element in inspiring educational change according to Glatthorn et al. (2012).

A school leader takes on many roles and must execute many tasks. Embedded within educational leadership is managing the school as an organization, building safety, working with members of the school community, responding to city, state, and federal expectations, supporting students, parents, and staff, and setting expectations for student achievement (CCSSO, 2008). Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) report that leadership is the second most important school-based factor for student achievement behind classroom instruction. School leadership does not directly impact student achievement but has an indirect, statistically significant effect on it. "The principal fosters the success of all students by facilitating the development, communication, implementation, and evaluation of a shared vision of

teaching and learning that leads to student academic progress and school improvement” (Stronge, 2013, p. 17).

Over time, many researchers have adjusted the wording to define the essential elements of instructional leadership, while the functions of those elements, or core practices, have primarily remained unchanged. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) boast the “basics of successful school leadership as setting directions, developing people, and developing the organization” (p. 5). Further, there was a set of 13 behaviors embedded within these three broad categories for school leadership. Later, Leithwood published a modified version of the three core practices with nine behaviors listed in 2005.

To broaden the scope of effective school leadership, the set of three evolved into a set of four core practices of effective school leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Stronge, 2013; The Wallace Foundation, 2012): managing for change of the culture and climate (Marks & Printy, 2003); leading for improved teaching and learning (Elmore, 1999); developing professional capacity (Elmore, 1999; Fullan, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000); and setting a shared mission and goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Marks & Printy, 2003) for the school. A principal’s ability to focus on the development of teachers’ knowledge and skills, professional community, program coherence, and technical resources (Fullan, 2002) also connect to core practices for effective school leadership. School leadership has been redefined to include guiding instructional improvement (Elmore, 1999). Instructional leadership is included as a core practice of Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, and Orr (2010) and Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins

(2008). Leech, Smith, Green, and Fulton (2003) say, “It is vital for us as participants, teachers, and researchers of educational leadership to explore this sometimes murky notion of principal leadership” (p. 1).

### **Instructional Leadership vs. Curriculum Leadership**

While instructional leadership, or leading for teaching and learning (Elmore, 1999), stands alone as one of the core effective, school leadership practices, it often emerges in a supporting role/capacity of other core practices of school leadership. It often appears within multiple dimensions and “incorporates a number of practices” (Southworth, 2002, p. 77). Aronson and DeBenedictis (1988) identify five enabling behaviors of effective curriculum leaders: communication, positive climate, building a shared vision with staff, professional development, and being a positive role model. Principals use behaviors that have a school-wide impact rather than a narrowly focused curriculum emphasis (Aronson & DeBenedictis, 1988). Each of these five behaviors are embedded within the six core practices I selected to build the framework for this study.

Similarities are shared between the two concepts of instructional and curriculum leadership. The role of the principal has evolved over time to include behaviors from both instructional and curriculum leadership. The curriculum leader extends instructional leadership a few steps to one evoke educational change through the knowledge of theory and practice (Glatthorn et al., 2012). According to Glatthorn et al. (2012), instructional leaders play an active role in staff development, collaboration, building professional relationships, creating a sense of community, and establishing clear goals and high expectations with staff. Additionally, Spiro (2013)



notes that instructional leaders provide staff with guidance and a sense of mission (p. 28). Teacher motivation is the impetus upon which educational improvements can be achieved. Therefore, an instructional leader “creates synergy across relevant variables” (Spiro, 2013, p. 28) and those variables are the key elements of effective instructional leadership. For this study, the term “instructional leadership” will be utilized in order to create cohesion and fluidity yet it will embed the behaviors of curriculum leadership as referenced by Glatthorn et al. (2012).

### **Overview of Effective Instructional Leadership Practices**

Three broad dimensions of instructional leadership emerge from Hallinger and Murphy (1985): defining the school mission, managing the curriculum and instructional program, and promoting the school climate. Within these three dimensions were eleven functions of instructional leadership (see Table 1), yet Hallinger and Murphy (1986) reduced the eleven functions to eight to better “represent the substance of principals instructional leadership role” (pp. 2-3). Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985, 1986) framework has been cited and used as a conceptual framework for dozens of studies since the late 1980s (Hallinger, 2005).

Table 1

*Dimensions of Instructional Leadership of Hallinger and Murphy (1985)*

Defines the Mission	Manages Instructional Program	Promotes School Climate
1) Framing school goals	3) Supervising and evaluating instruction	6) Protecting instructional time
2) Communicating school goals	4) Coordinating curriculum	7) Promoting professional development
	5) Monitoring student progress	8) Maintaining high visibility
		9) Providing incentives for teachers
		10) Enforcing academic standards
		11) Providing incentives for students

Table 2

*Dimensions of Instructional Leadership of Hallinger and Murphy (1986)*

Defines the Mission	Manages Instructional Program	Promotes School Climate
1) Framing and communicating school goals	3) Coordinating curriculum	6) Promoting the professional development of teachers
2) Supervising and evaluating instruction	4) Developing high academic standards and expectations	7) Protecting instructional time
	5) Monitoring student progress	8) Developing incentives for students and teachers

Later, Hallinger and Murphy's (1985, 1986) three dimensions and eight functions were "reconceptualized" (Hallinger, 2005, p. 233) and winnowed to reflect six current core practices in effective instructional leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008): motivating for change, designing and modifying curriculum, providing professional development for teachers to improve teaching and learning strategies, analyzing school and student data, collaborating, and providing meaningful feedback to teachers through the teacher-evaluation process. These six

practices reflect current trends in educational leadership with the focus on the role of instructional leaders.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) and Whitaker (1997) utilized the four areas instructional leaders for improving student achievement mentioned by Smith and Andrews (1989): be a resource provider, be an instructional resource to staff, be a good communicator, and be a visible presence. Another definition of an instructional leader includes one who sets clear goals, allocates resources to instruction, manages curriculum, monitors lesson plans, and evaluates teachers according to Jenkins (2009). These practices are embedded within the six core practices selected for this study from Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) and Leithwood et al. (2008).

Each of the six core practices of effective instructional leadership meshes with other core practices. They often do not stand alone but act in conjunction with other core practices.

### **Motivating for Change**

Motivating for change is setting a clear direction or vision and attainable goals for a school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). According to Glatthorn et al. (2012), “sharing common goals is key to making curriculum changes in a district, school, or classroom” (p. 157). In motivating staff to make changes, school goals must be developed together, embraced and become part of a shared vision (Stronge, 2013). That shared vision guides the school community to student success and school improvement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Developing a shared vision requires collaboration and the building of ownership. To provide an opportunity to collaborate for buy-in, everyone’s contributions play an integral role in

moving the school toward achieving its goals (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). “The principal helps to spell out that vision and get all others on board with it” (Mendels, 2012, p. 55). Establishing buy-in from members of the school community is essential for change efforts to take hold. Hence, building relationships with teachers (Lytle, 2012) is key to influencing them to work alongside instructional leaders to make decisions. For example, principals need to work with teachers to “supervise and coordinate decisions within and between grade levels” (Glatthorn et al., 2012, p. 275).

To further encourage collaboration and buy-in via intrinsic motivation, an effective instructional leader will provide praise or recognition for their teachers’ efforts (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Investing in teachers’ work shows leaders “taking an interest in building teachers’ confidence” (Glatthorn et al., 2012, p. 291). Marzano, et al., (2005) pinpoint recognizing and celebrating staff accomplishments to empower and motivate them to make decisions and take risks. Additionally, providing individual or staff professional development that relates to (Glatthorn et al., 2012) improvement contributes to motivating teachers.

Imperative to this practice is collaborating with staff to “frame and communicate school goals” (Blase & Blase, 1998a, p. 11). Developing a vision with staff, establishing clear goals, and making them a priority (Glatthorn, 1997; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005) require collaboration. This level of collaboration builds capacity in leading a school. “Cultivating a shared vision, developing organizational capacity, and managing

change” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010, p. 180) ensure that teachers’ voices are heard in contributing to and leading toward staff commitment (Lashway, 2002).

**Motivation: Interpersonal relationships.** Shaping the teaching and learning environment is accomplished by developing the culture of the building with staff. The elements within this subcategory relate to interpersonal skills. Lashway (2002, p. 9) notes that part of building interpersonal skills is “maintaining trust, motivating staff, building empowerment, and enhancing collegiality.” Portin et al., (2009) report that instructional leaders must have “expertise in communicating and building relationships with teachers as such factors into how well leaders are welcomed into classrooms and what they are able to accomplish with teachers” (p. vi).

Per Hallinger and Murphy (1986), communication is essential to building relationships among staff and sharing the importance of teaching and learning. Instructional leaders “create opportunities to share information related to routine events and share substantive information regarding visits to classrooms” (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986, p. 7). Aronson and DeBenedictis (1988) highlight providing opportunities for teachers to feel free to present ideas to the school’s leadership to earn respect and trust from faculty. Creating an open climate for communication by being available for interaction (Marzano et al., 2005) invites teachers to share opinions and feedback, and discuss new ideas (Aronson & DeBenedictis, 1988; Blase & Blase, 2000). To demonstrate respect for teachers, instructional leaders extend autonomy as a motivator to encourage innovation in instruction (Blase & Blase, 1998a).

Being accessible (Blase & Blase, 1998a, 1999) and visible in classrooms on a routine basis promotes “informal interactions which may provide the principal with

information on the needs of the teachers and as a way to communicate the priorities of the school” (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, p. 223). For example, being accessible to staff may allow them to feel comfortable with approaching the principal to discuss concerns or feedback. Per Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, and Giles (2005), “develop and influence people with caring relationships with staff as a way to build a positive culture and support teachers professionally” (pp. 613-4) and establish trust with teachers. Portin et al., (2009) note the importance of building relationships beyond the formal evaluation through informal interactions as a motivator.

Taking interest in teachers by having an awareness of their personal lives and ensuring face-to-face interactions (Elmore, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Marzano et al., 2005), builds confidence and motivates teachers to commit to teaching and learning (Glatthorn et al., 2012). In effort to build capacity, Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) suggest “recognizing staff and having confidence in the value of teachers’ work and being sensitive to their needs” (p. 116). For example, make time to “publically and privately recognize teachers’ efforts” to improve instruction (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986, p. 6) and their contributions to school improvement. Hallinger and Murphy (1986) suggest finding creative ways to reward or recognize teachers for their work, such as nominations for awards or letters.

Building trust involves “having a credible track record of delivery of support and materials” according to Aronson and DeBenedictis (1988, p. 26). Per Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008, p. 32), “school leaders made strong and positive influences on staff members’ motivations, commitments, and beliefs concerning the supportiveness of their working conditions” (p. 32). Praise teachers to not only

reinforce the use of effective teaching strategies (Blase & Blase, 1998a; Whitaker, 1997), but to motivate teachers in preparing unique lesson plans (Glatthorn et al., 2012). Similarly, acknowledging teachers' efforts encourages participating in school improvement initiatives.

Lastly, Marzano et al. (2005) note effective instructional leaders demonstrate an optimism that inspires others as a driving force to implement challenging innovation. Aronson and DeBenedictis (1988) and Whitaker (1997) support being energetic and enthusiastic about ideas to encourage teachers to take risks.

**Motivation: Providing support to teachers.** Instructional leaders develop people by providing support (Louis et al., 2010). "To get the job done, effective leaders need to make good use of the resources at hand. In other words, they have to be good managers of people and resources" (The Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 14). Effective instructional leaders support their staff by offering professional development. "Teachers report that principals who do nothing as instructional leaders have a negative effect on motivation which lead to feelings of being unsupported and a loss of respect for the principal" (Blase & Blase, 1998a, p. 118). Investing in teachers' work indicates "taking an interest in helping build confidence" (Glatthorn et al., 2012, p. 291). An example is granting teachers the necessary time and resources to attend conferences and other opportunities for professional development (Aronson & DeBenedictis, 1988) to motivate for buy-in.

As another source of motivation, effective instructional leaders create opportunities for teachers to share ideas and even function as a member of a team (Aronson & DeBenedictis, 1988). Encouraging teachers to be a member of a team

invites collaboration and enriches professional development (Blase & Blase, 1998a, p. 84) while supporting the use of collaboration motivates teachers to share ideas (Blase & Blase, 2000; Lashway, 2002).

### **Designing and Modifying Curriculum**

An effective instructional leader is directly involved in the development of curriculum (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Stronge (2013) states that teachers and principals believe it is important to have someone guide the curriculum. Blase and Blase (1998b) indicate effective instructional leaders have knowledge of curriculum in addition to knowledge of research in the content areas, particularly for those at the secondary level. Instructional leaders work to ensure curricular materials are consistent with the school's goals (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986) and aligned to the curriculum-based standards. Instructional leaders have current knowledge in redesigning and implementing strategies related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment to share with teachers (DuFour, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005). Further, they make sure to “communicate the importance of curriculum, instruction, and assessment” (Stronge 2013, p. 20) and tie them into the school's mission.

Designing and modifying curriculum link closely to the other core practices of collaboration, motivating for change, analyzing data, providing feedback to teachers, and providing professional development. Instructional leaders offer in-depth, professional development prior to and on a continuous basis to coordinate curriculum, ensure it is aligned to standards, and implemented with fidelity (Blase & Blase, 1998a; Glatthorn et al. 2012). Additionally, teachers are offered opportunities to coordinate and align curriculum with teachers of similar subject areas.



Lastly, curriculum must be monitored in practice then critiqued and evaluated to encourage successful implementation (Glatthorn et al. 2012). Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) suggest encouraging staff to develop and attain curricular standards and make decisions regarding revising curriculum and instruction collaboratively. For example, in order to provide direct instructional support to teachers (Louis et al., 2010; Protheroe, 2011; The Wallace Foundation, 2012), a keen awareness of teaching and learning is necessary to monitor lesson plans to ensure they are aligned with instructional goals. Another aspect of managing the curriculum is ensuring the curriculum promotes student learning (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Effective principals work to improve achievement by focusing on the quality of instruction. “They help establish and communicate high expectations, provide support for teachers, and connect directly with teachers and the classroom” (The Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 11). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) stress “identifying and implementing forms of teaching and learning that are appropriate and effective for the populations they serve” (p. 8).

### **Providing Professional Development to Teachers**

Providing professional development incorporate elements from each of the other core practices and link several together. Effective principals also encourage continual professional learning. Hallinger and Murphy (1986), Marzano et al. (2005), Elmore (1999), and Spiro (2013) suggest providing resources to support teachers’ efforts to improve and enhance classroom instruction. When addressing emergent instructional needs, instructional leaders may examine student achievement data to determine formal staff development opportunities. Therefore, focusing on actual

needs related to school goals ensure the “professional development is meaningful and encourages innovation” (Blase & Blase, 1998a, p. 49).

Instructional leaders not only support and develop professional development aligned to school goals for teachers but also participate in the professional learning with staff (Blase & Blase, 1998a). Stronge (2013) specifies “effective principals take the lead in promoting professional growth and learning for both themselves and their staffs” (p. 24). Instructional leaders “provide opportunities for professional growth and model professional learning for teachers” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010, p. 114)

Teachers reported that a principal’s participation in professional development workshops positively affected teachers’ feeling of “being supported” (Blase & Blase, 1999, p. 6). Blase and Blase (1998b) promote professional growth as a major theme of instructional leadership in addition to supporting collaboration among educators for studying teaching and learning. Additionally, effective instructional leaders provide teachers with professional learning opportunities (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985) in a collaborative setting.

Glatthorn et al. (2012, p. 233) suggest making professional development a priority in the school. In addition, they suggest providing professional support based on what teachers need (Glatthorn et al., 2012) by incorporating “teacher input into the design and content to increase value” (Blase & Blase, 1998a, p. 51). In an effort to bolster teachers’ motivation and self-esteem (Blase & Blase, 1998a), developing a plan demonstrates the instructional leader’s dedication to the school’s vision of improving teaching and learning. Louis et al. (2010) and Glatthorn et al. (2012) advise creating a high quality, learning environment based on effective staff

development through a differentiated program. Glatthorn et al. (2012) suggest implementing any of the following four types of professional development depending on teachers' needs: "staff development as a group; informal observation (through brief, unannounced visits, measuring the impact of staff development, and supporting a professional learning community); rating by providing specific, timely feedback on a classroom observation; and, self-directed professional development" (pp. 280-287). Blase and Blase (1998b) conducted a qualitative research study using questionnaires and discovered effective instructional leaders were diligent in keeping staff informed of current trends and providing them with opportunities to address instructional needs. To engage teachers in refining their craft in addition to building self-esteem (Blase & Blase, 1999), instructional leaders endorse continual learning and enhance teachers' knowledge base (Fullan, 2002) by providing a myriad of opportunities for professional growth. Blase and Blase (1998a), Elmore (1999), Fullan (2001), Marzano et al. (2005), and Supovitz (2002) insist that leaders ensure staff is aware of the most current theories and practices by sharing new and current research. Effective instructional leaders not only share professional articles with staff but extend an invitation to discuss the work and ways to utilize the information in the classroom and model instructional strategies for staff (Aronson and DeBenedictis, 1988; Blase & Blase, 1998a).

Effective instructional leaders establish job-embedded learning in which "teachers model lessons in one another's classrooms" (Fullan, 2010, p. 12). "The learning-focused principal is intent on helping teachers improve their practice either

directly or with the aid of school leaders like department chairs and other teaching experts” (The Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 14).

Frequent, informal visits to classrooms for short periods of time to make formative observations on learning and professional growth is essential to maintaining high visibility and providing support to teachers. Further, effective instructional leaders find something positive in what they observe in the classrooms and then provide feedback in any area(s) that need improvement (Louis et al., 2010). Part of conducting these visits to classrooms is to provide “direct and immediate feedback” (Louis et al., 2010, p. 86).

### **Analyzing School and Student Data**

While analyzing school and student data has been determined to be a core practice of effective instructional leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008), there are few research studies published on analyzing the use of it in conjunction with effective instructional leadership. Some anecdotal information in the literature notes that principals need to know how to use data to make informed decisions (Spiro, 2013) and be able to ask practical questions about data in order to use it for collaborative inquiry among teachers and provide meaningful feedback (Portin et al., 2009). Effective instructional leaders identify data from diverse sources for the purpose of analysis (Aronson & DeBenedictis, 1998). Data must be used to research and evaluate the effectiveness and success of a school’s programs (Lashway, 2002) to manage school improvement, inform school planning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2005), and monitor progress (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). For example, students’ test results may be used for setting school goals, assessing

curriculum, evaluating instruction, and measuring progress of students (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985, p. 223). Glatthorn et al. (2012) state that “data collection and analysis provide curriculum leaders with power to make good decisions, work intelligently, work effectively and efficiently” (p. 202).

Glatthorn et al. (2012) discuss collecting data over a period of time from three of the four types of professional development for review and analysis. Specifically, use data obtained from informal observations to supplement the information collected from the ratings as a method to assess needs for professional growth (Glatthorn et al. 2012). The practice of analyzing data is used as a tool for seeking continuous improvement (Glatthorn et al., 2012) rather than simply for judging teachers’ performance in the classroom.

Portin et al. (2009) suggest using “data extensively to focus and anchor improvement work” (p. v). Additionally, data analysis is used to structure collaborative inquiry among teachers (Portin et al., 2009) and provides instructional leaders with information on teachers’ evaluations. Namely, examining data from teacher evaluations allow the instructional leader to determine steps in framing practical, professional development opportunities.

“In addition to using data to inform their decisions, supervisory leaders found various ways of encouraging or expecting teachers to use data as a means for informing their practice” (Portin et al., 2009, p. 60). Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) suggest modeling how to analyze data for staff in order to encourage usage. Analyzing data should not be done in isolation (Glatthorn et al., 2012). When it comes to data, effective principals try to elicit evidence to “ask useful questions of the

information, display it in ways that tell ‘compelling stories’ and to use it to promote ‘collaborative inquiry among teachers’” (Portin et al., 2009, p. v). Data are a “means not only to pinpoint problems but to understand their nature and causes” (Louis, et al., 2010, p. 195).

## **Collaboration**

Collaboration links to each of the other core practices. According to Fullan (2002), “information only becomes knowledge in a social process” (p. 1). Therefore creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective school leadership. Through an analysis of survey data via scatterplot, Marks and Printy (2003) discovered that schools with instructional leaders who collaborate with staff to make decisions, are schools in which teachers and principal “are full partners in furthering high quality teaching and learning” (p. 387). Stronge (2013) notes that effective school leaders are able to achieve the school’s instructional goals by collaborating with staff to promote the use of effective instructional practices and accomplish organizational goals for teaching and learning” (Marks & Printy 2003, p. 377). By providing collaborative learning opportunities, an effective instructional leader is able to build trust and collective responsibility amongst teachers (Blase & Blase, 1999) and this type of collaboration boosts “motivation, confidence, and ownership of decisions” (Blase & Blase, 1998b, pp. 7-8).

The Wallace Foundation (2012) suggests that principals play a major role in developing a professional learning community of teachers who guide one another in improving instruction. In short, “When principals and teachers share leadership, teachers’ working relationships with one another are stronger and student achievement

is higher” (Louis et al., 2010, p. 282). “A strong sense of affiliation and caring among all adults in a school is crucial to engaging and motivating students to learn. This is especially true in school settings where trust and cohesion have been low.”

(Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 9). Therefore, encouraging an environment of collaboration is essential to building trust and respect among professionals and creating opportunities for support and professional development (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) among teachers.

**Collaboration through shared leadership.** Principals manage the distribution of expertise and structure regular team dialogue about teaching and learning with leadership teams (Portin et al., 2009). “Leadership for instruction emerges from both the principal and the teachers “(Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 374). Principals and teachers discuss alternatives rather than mandates to work together as “communities of learners” in service to students (Blase & Blase, 1999). To further highlight the core practice of collaboration through shared leadership, Marks and Printy (2003) detail active collaboration of the principal and teachers on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The instructional leader collaborates with staff to gain his/her perspective and expertise to work toward school improvement as a community of learners (Blase & Blase, 1998b). Leithwood et al. (2008) indicate building collaborative cultures for decision-making and buy-in. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) further suggest “providing opportunities for staff to participate in decision-making about issues that affect them and for which their knowledge is crucial” (p. 7). In order to bring about change, Hallinger and Murphy (1986) note “developing collaborative organizational decision-making processes among staff” (p. 8). For instance, “changes

are more likely to be successfully implemented if they are based on collegiality and collaboration” (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986, p. 9); one way to secure such is to obtain input from teachers in the development of the school’s mission. Two aspects of shared leadership involve teachers in decision-making and in the implementation of important policies (Marzano et al., 2005). Marzano et al. (2005) suggest developing a strong leadership team, best for distributing responsibilities. Increasing ownership through collaborative decision-making and encouraging team-effort among teachers (Blase & Blase, 1998a, p. 64).

Further, in schools with shared leadership, teachers organize themselves into professional communities to engage in reflective discussions about curriculum, assessment, and instruction and to have a collective sense of responsibility about student learning (Louis et al., 2010). They further note that effective schools have principals make it a priority to create opportunities for collaboration. Spreading leadership with staff, per Louis et al. (2010) ensures all stakeholders have influence in decision-making. The concept of shared leadership requires the “collective knowledge and wisdom” of the school community (Louis et al., 2010, p. 35). According to Spiro (2013), “teachers work better when they hear from other teachers” (p. 30); hence, encourage faculty members to collaborate with and learn from one another to promote buy-in.

### **Providing Feedback to Teachers**

Supervising and evaluating instruction is a core practice that supports ensuring the school’s mission and goals are being carried out in the classrooms (Blase & Blase, 1998a; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). An essential element of providing feedback to



teachers about their practice is to ensure the feedback is meaningful. For teachers to consider and reflect (Lashway, 2002) about their practice, the feedback must be “non-judgmental, detailed, and descriptive” (Blase & Blase, 1998a, p. 35). To engage teachers in making adjustments to their practice, instructional leaders need to offer constructive criticism (Blase & Blase, 1998a; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). Feedback enhances motivation and improves the school’s climate (Blase & Blase, 1998a). To boost morale, another aspect is to “provide detailed praise to specific teachers” (Blase & Blase, 1998a, p. 44) about noteworthy strategies observed.

Fink and Resnick (2001) along with Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) recommend making classroom visits to observe and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching. After a classroom observation, an effective instructional leader is expected to provide teachers with meaningful feedback (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) in an effort to praise positive work and improve teaching practice. In addition, Whitaker (1997) relays including words of encouragement and taking the time to write a note about an informal observation has a positive impact. Portin et al. (2009) suggest “generating conversations specific about instruction in order to give the teacher a clear sense of what to work on and how” (p. v).

An effective instructional leader provides teachers with specific professional development tailored to meet the individual teacher’s needs (Glatthorn et al., 2012). For example, ahead of observing teachers’ classroom performance, Glatthorn et al. (2012) propose instructional leaders provide teachers with professional development on informal observation and rating so they may have a clear understanding of the

specific frame of feedback they will receive. Further, in extending beyond instructional leadership, Glatthorn et al., 2012 note principals must:

Understand the process of evaluation and how it should be administered, be able to convey knowledge of curriculum and instructional strategies, and be able to convey their expectations of how teaching and learning can be enhanced through the curriculum. (p. 365)

Marzano et al. (2005) detail “monitoring, evaluating, and providing feedback to enhance achievement, and monitor curriculum and instruction” (p. 54).

### **Overall Summary**

These six core practices are the most critical practices of effective instructional leadership: motivating for change, designing and modifying curriculum, providing professional development, analyzing school and student data, collaboration, and providing meaningful feedback (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). The work of Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) and Leithwood et al. (2008) have inspired the conceptual framework of this study. Each of these core practices is linked with another in some capacity. The syntheses of these six core practices establish grounds for studying the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Research Design**

To examine teachers' experiences with effective instructional leadership, I conducted a qualitative study using Moustakas' (1994) systematic approach to transcendental phenomenology as modified from Edmund Husserl (1969) as the method of research. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews to guide teachers' thinking and keep them focused on the topic. I selected teachers as the primary source of data and utilized the philosophy of phenomenology in an effort to gain a deep understanding of their experiences (van Manen, 1990; Creswell, 2009) with effective instructional leadership. Considering the focus of the study, the following question guided the research: What is the nature of high school teachers' lived experiences with school leaders demonstrating effective instructional leadership practices? In phenomenology, "perception is regarded as a primary source of knowledge and that source cannot be doubted" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52) as it is the lived experience for the individuals who have shared those perceptions.

The first step of transcendental phenomenology begins with the researcher engaging in the process of Epoche, which requires the elimination of biases and preconceptions in an effort to be open to the information conveyed during the interviews (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). Prior to each interview, I documented my assumptions and prejudgments in a journal to be receptive to teachers' viewpoints (see Appendix I).

Next, I conducted an interview with each participant to learn about the essence of the phenomenon. To commence each interview, I bracketed the topic (Moustakas, 1994) of effective instructional leadership by presenting the research question to encourage each teacher to stay focused on the purpose. The interviews targeted themes representing the six core practices of instructional leadership. Teachers were asked to identify and describe their experiences with effective instructional leadership. I used a guide with semi-structured, open-ended questions for the interviews. During each interview, I took notes to remain track, use for reference later in the interview, and develop an individual textural description after each interview. After each interview I ensured phenomenological reduction was accomplished by developing a textural description of “what one sees, the internal act of consciousness, and the relationship between the phenomenon itself and self” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). In other words, the statements describing how the participants experienced the topic were “horizontalized, or listed separately, and given equal worth” (Creswell, 1998, p. 147). Therefore, allowing each teacher’s perceptions and thoughts on their experiences to be described completely to “derive a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Meaning units were then developed and clustered into themes (Moustakas, 1994) for each teacher’s interview. For the next step, I wrote structural descriptions for each interview using imaginative variation, which “aims to grasp the structural essences of the experience.” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35). Further, imaginative variation “presents a picture of the conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35) detailing how the phenomenon was experienced by each person. Effective instructional leadership

practices have been “illuminated through careful, comprehensive descriptions, vivid, and accurate renderings of the teachers’ experiences rather than measurements, ratings, or scores” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105). Using a numerical system through a quantitative study would render my results easier to interpret; however, using a contextual basis for the results will give readers a better understanding of my findings and bring life to this study. My intent was to obtain comprehensive stories from the teachers on how they experienced and described instructional leadership in/from their personal, lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 107)

Finally, to create an overall picture of what the participants’ experienced with effective instructional leadership practices, I integrated the textures and structures of all interviews into meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994) to create meaning. These combined descriptions formed a composite textural-structural description of the two sets of teachers’ perceptions. Using the six core practices as my framework, I compared the syntheses from the teachers of each school to one another. Then, I compared the textural and structural themes from each school alongside the research on the key practices of effective instructional leadership.

A qualitative study using phenomenology presents the richness of the teachers’ words and explanations of instructional leadership. Therefore, the teachers’ descriptions of their experiences provide a deep understanding of what effective instructional leadership means at two high schools in Rhode Island. I used semi-structured interviews as the data collection procedure for this study. This allowed the teacher participants the flexibility to share their experiences in detail. It was a way to

“give teachers a voice as it may be overlooked in educational leadership research”  
(Rudduck, 1993, p. 8).

### **Setting for the Study**

The two comprehensive public high schools used in this study contain grades 9 through 12 and are located in two urban-ring school districts in Rhode Island. Each high school is led by a principal with at least four years of experience in the position and two assistant principals. Denistown High School contains approximately 1000 students with nearly 100 faculty members while Bayside High School has approximately 1500 students with nearly 130 faculty members. Each high school has experienced an increase in NECAP scores over the past 2 years, hence I wanted to learn about the effective instructional leadership practices experienced by the teachers in those schools.

### **Data Collection Calendar**

In November 2013, I contacted the principals of two high schools to obtain permission to conduct research at the schools. Once both sites were secured and signed permissions were obtained, I applied for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Rhode Island to conduct the study. In December 2013, I received approval from the IRB to begin collecting data.

From December 2013 through January 2014, I contacted potential research participants who expressed interest in participating. In January and February 2014, the potential participants and I established a time and date to meet for an interview. Interviews were completed in early February 2014.

## **Sampling Design and Procedures**

Phenomenology merits the use of criterion sampling in which all participants meet a set of predetermined criteria (Creswell, 1998). I established a set of three requirements to determine which teachers would be the best fit as participants: a) teach a core subject (English, Math, Science, or Social Studies); b) have at least eight years of teaching experience; and c) be willing to participate in the study. It is expected that teachers with eight or more years teaching in a content area will have experienced the phenomenon of instructional leadership with a school principal, in some capacity, and be able to provide vivid details of their experiences. Teachers of core subjects were selected because school leaders involve core subject areas in curricular revisions often, particularly with the advent of the Rhode Island Grade Span Expectations (GSE) in 2005-2006 and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010. Per Creswell (1998), “it is essential that all participants experience the phenomenon being studied” (p. 118) as they are more likely to provide rich details about those experiences. Of the nearly 100 core-subject area teachers at both schools, approximately 85 have eight or more years of experience teaching their core subject. Of those potential participants, I hoped to have ten teachers volunteer to participate in the study. For a phenomenological study, ten individuals are recommended for collecting information as the “important point is to describe the meaning of a small number of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 122). I created a flyer (see Appendix B) indicating that potential research participants must meet the established criteria in order to participate and details about the study. I was able to secure eight teachers for interviews. A total of ten teachers expressed

interest in participating yet two did not follow through with setting a time and date to meet. Ultimately, there were four volunteers from each high school who met with me for a one-on-one interview.

### **General Characteristics of the Participants**

The participants were teachers at one of two high schools in two urban-ring school districts in Rhode Island. The criteria noted teachers need to have at least eight years of teaching experience in a content area such as English, Math, Science, or Social Studies. Of the eight teachers at the two high schools, six of them are department chairs (see Table 3) leading a department of at least ten teachers. All but one teaches a core subject, the other teaches “business” courses. Five of the eight teachers are female.

The department chairs have a range of experience in leading either their department or different committees over the course of their careers as teachers. As department chairs, they have a closer relationship to the principal than the two teachers in this study. Therefore, the department chairs share more direct examples to share about their experiences with effective instructional leadership with relation to the principal. The scope of experience with leading a departments ranges from five months to 13 years. At Denistown High School, all of the teachers who volunteered to participate are department chairs and we met during their free class period. They are all female and have between 18 and 23 years of teaching experience with an average of four years as a department chair. At Bayside High School, there is a range of teaching and leadership experience represented. The two department chairs are relatively new to the position with six months and two years of experience



respectively. All of the teacher participants at Bayside High School have taught between 13 and 16 years.

At Denistown High School, all of the teachers have taken educational leadership courses for certification as a school administrator at some point in their careers or have completed a degree program in such. For Bayside High School, only one mentioned working on coursework in educational leadership. In reference to leading committees, each department chair has led at least one committee; however, neither of the teachers noted having led a committee.

In my view, choosing to require a minimum of eight years of teaching experience ensures the teachers have experienced a myriad of changes in education such as standardized assessments (NECAP and PARCC), national and local policy changes (NCLB, RttT, and curriculum alignment), and the adoption of various academic (CCSS and GSEs). Hence, they will provide a rich description of their direct experiences with instructional leaders.

Table 1

*General Characteristics of Participants*

Pseudonym	School	Gender	Years Teaching	Subject	Years as Department Chair
Mr. Archer	Bayside HS	M	15	Social Studies	0
Mrs. Koczan	Denistown HS	F	22	English	6 mo
Mrs. Lavoie-Perez	Bayside HS	F	13	English	0
Mr. Leet	Bayside HS	M	16	Social Studies	6 mo
Mrs. Matthews	Denistown HS	F	18	Social Studies	5
Mrs. Mercer	Denistown HS	F	22	Business	6
Mrs. Salvatore	Denistown HS	F	23	Math	5
Mr. Vieira	Bayside HS	M	13	Social Studies	2

## **Data Collection Procedure**

I placed a phone call to the principal of each high school to discuss my research and interest in having teachers from his/her school participate in sharing their experiences with effective instructional leadership. The two principals agreed to allow me to use their school. To confirm my request, I emailed each principal a letter (see Appendix A) asking for permission to use the site and meet with teachers. I also attached a flyer (see Appendix B) explaining the nature of the study along with criteria and expectations for participation. Neither principal agreed to allow me to speak with the teachers during a department or faculty meeting to recruit volunteers. Instead, they agreed to share the flyer in an effort to prompt interest in participating in the study.

In one setting, Denistown High School, four teachers promptly contacted me about participating. However, at Bayside High, the principal asked me send an email to teachers asking if they would like to participate (see Appendix C). A total of six teachers volunteered. Four teachers arranged appointments either through email or a phone call to be interviewed. The other two teachers did not follow up with setting a time and date to meet despite two attempts to contact them via email and telephone.

Once the potential participants responded, I contacted them individually via email to schedule a brief, ten-minute meeting to answer questions, discuss the informed consent form (see Appendix D), describe their participation, have each participant complete a form to collect demographic data to describe their teaching history (see Appendix G), and assure them that confidentiality of their identity and participation would be accomplished. Each of the teachers preferred to meet with me to discuss the study and conduct the interview at the same time. Additionally, all

potential participants received the informed consent form (see Appendix D) via email to preview ahead of the interview. Of the eight participants, six are department chairs teaching at least two classes. The other two are classroom teachers. Seven of the eight interviews were conducted at the school during a free class period. One teacher agreed to be interviewed outside the school on his free time.

Prior to each interview, as the researcher, I reflected on the process of *Epoche* to release any preconceptions and potential biases by writing a journal entry prior to each interview (see Appendix I). I invited the participants to be interviewed in January 2014. The in-depth interviews were conducted one-on-one. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions about instructional leadership to “evoke a comprehensive account of the person’s experience of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114).

At each interview, the process began with a brief description of the purpose, a bracketing the topic (Moustakas, 1994), along with a discussion about informed consent and collecting demographic data (see Appendix G). All participants willingly signed the informed consent form agreeing to participate and allow the interview to be recorded. Additionally, each participant agreed to complete the demographic data form. At that meeting, I offered a description of how the interview was semi-structured in that I would be asking open-ended questions about instructional leadership and asked them to be honest in their responses. I stressed confidentiality and how they could share names and details that would be later neutralized to ensure their confidential participation in the study. I assured them that I would rename each participant for the purpose of reporting their data in this study. We discussed they

would be contacted to validate the data from their individual interview and potentially asked for additional information or clarification of responses.

At first, the participants shared information timidly as little detail was divulged. As I attempted to establish a safe and comfortable interaction, each participant began to share more information as I asked for additional specific details. Each interview ran between 38 to 78 minutes. I utilized the interview guide with semi-structured, open-ended questions (see Appendix E) in addition to other, open-ended questions that were based upon responses the participants gave. At times, the participants noted something that required clarification. Hence, it was important for me to obtain specific details as I believed the teachers were unsure about what to share and how much detail to offer. To press for further details, at times, I needed to state, “Tell me more about...”

The interviews were recorded using an Apple iPod Touch with an external microphone to clearly capture each moment. The equipment was tested prior to each interview to ensure quality and volume control of background noises. During one interview, the room had a great deal of background noise due to the heater in the classroom and thus it was necessary to move to a room with less background noise. During each interview, I took notes in a journal to keep me on track and to use for later reference in the interview when asking follow-up questions. Additionally, those notes were used to write a draft of a summary for each participant and the individual textural-structural descriptions, particularly for later use in the validation process when I emailed the teachers seeking approval of my interpretations of their individual interviews (see Appendix F).

Each audio file was downloaded as an mp4 file onto my computer and converted to an mp3 file. I hired a professional transcriptionist to transcribe the interviews and ensure the utmost accuracy in reporting. The transcriptions served as a source for data analysis. After listening to each interview, I began the process for writing questions to clarify information that was not well explained in the interviews. Upon reading the transcripts and listening to the interviews again, I drafted textural and structural descriptions. I then sent an email to the teachers to verify the contents of the textural-structural description, and if necessary, a set of clarifying questions (see Appendix F).

After I received responses, I began the process for writing more detailed individual textural and structural descriptions. Then, I developed a composite textural description and a composite structural description for each set of teachers at each school. Lastly, I crafted a composite textural-structural description for each school to use for examining the similarities and differences of the two high schools.

### **Tools for Collecting Data**

To begin, I created an interview guide (see Appendix E) as a tool to direct the interview (Moustakas, 1994) and collected the data by recording the interviews. The interviews were recorded using an Apple iPod Touch with an application titled Voice Memo and an attached external microphone to capture the interview clearly. The professional transcriptionist used Microsoft Word. After receiving the transcripts, I read the text while listening to the recorded interviews several times to ensure accuracy. The data was stored on a secure, locked, password-protected computer.

## **Data Analysis**

In order to capture the essence of teachers' experiences with effective instructional leadership, I analyzed the transcribed interview data according to a set of rigorous steps suggested by van Kaam (1966) and modified by Moustakas (1994, p. 120-121):

1) Listing and preliminary grouping: After reading the transcriptions and checking for accuracy of it by listening to the recordings, I highlighted each statement related to the phenomenon and gave each statement equal value.

2) Reduction and elimination: I examined each statement to determine the invariant constituents, or essences, by testing for two requirements:

- a) Is the statement necessary to understanding effective instructional leadership?
- b) Is it possible to label the statement?

3) Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents: I clustered the invariant constituents into relevant themes. I then connected the themes to the six core practices of effective instructional leadership to highlight the core themes of the phenomenon.

4) Final identification of the invariant constituents: I checked the invariant constituents and their theme with the full transcript of each interview. There are three concepts to consider for validating the data.

- (a) Are they expressed explicitly in the transcript?
- (b) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?
- (c) If not explicit or compatible, they were deleted.

5) Individual textural descriptions: I used the validated invariant constituents, themes, and direct examples from the transcripts to develop an individual textural description.

6) Individual structural descriptions: For each participant, I crafted an individual structural description of the experiences based on the textural description and the imaginative variation. The imaginative variation captures how the teachers experienced effective instructional leadership.

7) Individual textural-structural descriptions: I created a textural-structural description for each participant of their interview(s) by synthesizing the invariant constituents and themes to develop a description of the essence of the phenomenon for each teacher.

8) Participant validation: Prior to analyzing the individual descriptions, I sent teachers a copy of my findings asking for verification of the content (see Appendix F) and clarification of statements, if necessary.

9) Composite textural description: I used the individual textural descriptions to create a composite textural description of teachers' experiences with instructional leadership for each group of teachers from each high school, then for the whole group of teachers.

10) Composite structural description: I used the individual structural descriptions to create a composite structural description for each group of teachers from each high school, then for the whole group of teachers.

11) Composite textural-structural description: I developed a composite textural-structural description by synthesizing the themes from each group of teachers from one school, then compared it to the teachers from the other school. Once the syntheses were complete, I compared the data from the two schools with one another and to the six core practices of instructional leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). The synthesis of effective instructional leadership will be unique to this group of participants; therefore, the data here is unlikely to be generalizable to other settings with another unique set of teachers and instructional leaders.

### **Validation of Data**

As the sole researcher, it was essential to actively include validity strategies suggested by Creswell (1998). I employed three validity strategies with the first being a self-reflection technique to clarify and release any biases I bring to the study by reflecting on the process of Epoche (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998). Utilizing the process of Epoche is being intentionally conscious of my internal experience with instructional leadership (Moustakas, 1994). That “knowledge of intentionality requires we be present to ourselves and to things in the world, that we recognize self and world are inseparable components of meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). My role as an assistant principal has shaped my interest in this research, thus engaging in the use of Epoche assisted in relinquishing preconceptions to lessen my influence on the data. I “cleared my biases, preconceptions, and prejudgments to be attuned to my thinking” (Moustakas, 1994 p. 62) before listening to the teachers’ thoughts and considering their points of view (Moustakas, 1994).



Secondly, I used member checking (Creswell, 1998; Saldaña, 2013) by sharing my findings with the participants to confirm the findings were accurate and/or provide the participant an opportunity to add or clarify information. Third, my writing included using a “rich, thick description to convey the findings” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). According to Polkinghorne (1989, p. 57), “validity refers to the notion that an idea is well grounded and well supported.” Polkinghorne (1989), therefore, reminds the researcher to ask, “Does the general structural description provide an accurate portrait of the common features and structural connections that are manifest in the examples collected?” (p. 57). I utilized these last two strategies to examine each research participant’s interviews carefully to ensure a valid portrayal of the experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994) of effective instructional leadership.

Each recording was reviewed prior to analyzing the interview data. I analyzed the notes I wrote, as well, for areas that needed additional illumination. Each participant received a summary of his or her interview for validation. Secondly, clarifying questions were sent to four participants in an email, asking to share the information in whichever format was most convenient for them: phone, email, or in person. All participants who received follow-up questions opted to respond via email.

### **Statement on Researcher as Instrument**

By using the process of the Epoche (Moustakas, 1994), I attempted to set aside my own perspectives and biases in order to rely on the participants’ “voices and interpretations” (Creswell, 1998, p. 76) regarding effective instructional leadership. This researcher has been a teacher at a high school and an assistant principal at several middle and high schools in Rhode Island. However, my position does not have any

bearing on the participants' employment and it is not expected that my position had any bearing on the participants' responses.

Teachers are the key stakeholders of education who "receive the outcome of effective" (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012, p. 233) instructional leadership. To improve existing relationships between teachers and school leaders with regard to instruction, it is crucial to understand teachers' experiences with instructional leadership. We "cannot know what effective instructional leadership means unless we include stakeholders' perspectives and their constructions of leadership. If "leadership is a social construct, then we need to make it truly social and not a singular construction" (Southworth, 2002, p. 74). Interviewing teachers at these two Rhode Island high schools allowed me to capture differing viewpoints of school leaders working in two different contexts. Each high school has a unique culture and set of teachers; therefore, they are different contexts. While each school has a similar structure with regard to size, being an urban-ring school, teaching schedules, teachers, department chairs, two assistant principals, each has a unique goals for addressing the improvement of teaching and learning.

During the course of the eight interviews, each of the core practices was mentioned to the point of saturation. Themes and the relationships between them were detailed to the point of repetition in that nothing new emerged (Blase, 1987, p. 593).

### **Validation in Phenomenology**

In phenomenology, the researcher has an influence on the data as the interviewer and conducts the data analysis alone. Therefore, it is crucial to employ objective methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Epoeche (Moustakas,

1994) is the first step to attempt to limit bias. Participating in the process of Epoche (Moustakas, 1994) was to ensure I set aside my personal preconceptions of effective instructional leadership prior to each interview. My biases about instructional leadership could indeed shape my work in this study, but in order for me to honestly and neutrally share teachers' accounts, I had to remove my experiences. My pride or scope of experience within the area of instructional leadership must not be embedded in this study. Keeping such in mind was essential to ensure I was objective in asking the participants open-ended questions about effective instructional leadership.

To be open to the teachers' experiences, I wanted to ensure I did not bring any bias to the table or persuade them in any direction. I wrote of my experiences with instructional leadership in a journal prior to the interviews. My role as an assistant principal has influenced and inspired the direction of this study. I have observed many principals and assistant principals while being either a high school teacher or an assistant principal at several middle and high schools. My experiences in both roles directed my study to include teachers as their perceptions and experiences are not often given a voice.

While introducing myself to the teachers with whom I did not have any relationship prior to the interviews, I expressed the importance of learning about their experiences. I stressed that I sought to capture their words and give their perspective of effective instructional leadership a voice to enhance not only the research, but the actual work of instructional leaders in practice. I believe teachers are on the front line of teaching and learning in any given school. They are in the trenches and have direct experiences with instructional leadership. Highlighting their experiences offers a

unique perspective of effective instructional leadership that may be used in future research.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This study produced a synthesis of the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership from the perspectives of eight high school teachers in Rhode Island at two high schools. The resulting composite textural-structural description reveals the essence of the experience of the phenomenon for this group of teachers and consists of five major themes: motivating for change, communication, interpersonal relationship building, collaboration, and feedback for both Bayside and Denistown High Schools.

Per Chapter Three, eight teachers, four each from two high schools volunteered to participate in this study. Through the interviews, the participants shared their ideas about and experiences with effective instructional leadership while at their current teaching position or from a previous one. Further, some of the teachers described ideal expectations they had for effective instructional leadership by offering suggestions. Each participant's shared an array of positive and negative experiences; yet, on occasion, some responses were vague. Through email, I asked four teachers follow-up questions to clarify those general responses. They all complied and provided detailed responses to better depict their experiences. From the eight interview transcripts, I identified 692 statements relevant to the phenomenon of this study during my first round of reading the transcripts. By employing Moustakas' (1994) steps for data analysis and reduction, I checked each statement to certify the phenomenon was labeled accurately and related to the phenomenon. This process

increased the horizontalized statements to 721 invariant constituents. Table 4 provides an example of several horizontalized relevant statements from one participant I renamed Mr. Archer.

Table 4

*Horizontalized Statements*

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- So I think an administrator has to not just be the provider of the information, they [sic] have to understand where the teacher is coming from and, and try to sell it to them.
- An administrator is responsible for the teacher. You know? Every student does a better job when he wants to do well in your class. I think every teacher would do a better job when they feel the administrator is backing them [sic].
- I think one of the best things I could see is getting right on the ground and actually working with the teachers at the beginning of implementation.
- In the old days, administrators used to walk around the buildings, go through the rooms, and it would almost be a casual thing.
- It's a great chance for the teachers to know that the administrators are taking interest.
- An administrator would get such a better view of things with just every day walking around, observing.
- It brings us up to date on what's going on, future expectations due dates on things. But then, again, there are the official talking points of a meeting.
- When I say "socialize," it's not like, "Hey, how 'bout those Patriots?" I'm talking about you sit down at the table during lunch and, "Man, what is up with Johnny Jones? He's..." "Oh yeah, he had attitude in my room, too."
- But to take the time and say, "Okay. This is what I feel about this. This is my opinion on that. This is really much more important. Don't worry too much about that. I've taken care of that. We're going to kind of work together on that."
- "Look, any questions, just come and see me," and you know, that is a very good open-door policy.

- But say, if every teacher had to take a different track of professional development, and if each one of those tracks contain the number of PD hours that you're required for the year.
- They're a really good way of letting you know what's set for the week. You know, the technical stuff. They'll list what assemblies are on for the week.

The next step included clustering each teacher's horizontalized statements into core textural themes and subthemes that represented their experiences. By comparing the invariant constituents and textural themes with the transcripts, I was able to make certain that the themes were stated clearly and each participant's experiences were portrayed accurately. Table 5 provides an example of several textural themes with corresponding relevant statements for Mr. Archer.

Table 5

Textural Themes	Relevant Statements
<b>Show Commitment and Support for Teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think it's important for the communication, but then to follow up that communication with actions that support that and follow up what you're being told.</li> <li>• I'm helping you best I can with what we do know. "We're kind of all in this together, and we'll...let's ride this out and let's be positive. And I will do everything I can to help you do your job, because that's my main goal." And by doing that, the teachers will help the administrators out and won't be fighting them on everything.</li> <li>• I think every teacher would do a better job when they feel the administrator is backing them and saying, "I want you to be a better teacher."</li> </ul>
<b>Communication with Teachers About Changes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• But sometimes...you know, like, once the year begins I think a lot of teachers don't like that, suddenly...sudden changes of the way things are going. And again, I understand that sometimes it has to be done. There's usually not a lot of explanation.</li> </ul>

I don't know what kind of explanation there could be.

- I mean, you don't want to be an administrator that gets a reputation. Like all these lofty emails of, like, "Oh, we're a team. I love this! We're in this together," but then the next email is, "Oh, by the way, we've got to double the work."
- Pure, straight communication. Honesty. Make sure the teachers understand that it's a teamwork thing. Yes, you're the captain of the ship, but still if everyone's not working together, that boat's going to sink.
- I don't think they have a chance to really get into the classroom to really get a chance to see what's going on, other than the official.
- ... the administrator is getting a really good view of, "Okay. I walked through five rooms today. And again, four of the rooms are right on and this one room is out of control, and this has been going on for three weeks." Now you're just not picking on that one. You kind of are like, "Okay. I'm seeing a trend. I have some data here. I'll sit down for a class in that one class. Or maybe I'll just have a little talk." Not, you know, to berate or anything, just kind of touch some bases with that teacher and say, "Well, this is what I'm seeing. Why do you think that is?"

### **Pop-in Visits to Classrooms**

Upon verification of the textural themes, I used imaginative variation to identify the structural essences of each participant's experience as a means to describe how those experiences connected to the phenomenon. For each participant, I drafted an individual textural description of what each participant experienced including snippets from the transcripts. Next, I wrote an individual structural description of the teacher participant's experience using the textural and structural themes that emerged from each interview. Then, I created an individual textural-structural description combining the invariant constituents, textural themes, and structural themes to depict



the essence of the phenomenon for each participant. I sent each teacher the textural-structural description asking for it to be reviewed and to share with me whether the descriptions were accurate. I also asked for corrections to be made, if necessary. Mrs. Mercer added a few sentiments about goal-setting. All participants responded that the descriptions were accurate, and the four that were asked to provide additional information to clarify a few points from their interview responded through email. I added the additions from Mrs. Mercer as well as the clarifications from teachers Mrs. Koczan, Mr. Vieira, Mr. Archer, and Mrs. Lavoie-Perez into each respective participant's individual textural-structural description.

From the individual structural descriptions, I developed a composite structural description of the core essences of the experience of the phenomenon for all of the participants at each school, then as a group of eight. At Denistown High School, five major structural themes, and eleven textural themes emerged as the essence of how these participants experienced effective instructional leadership (See Appendix H). At Bayside High, there were five major themes and eleven textural themes. Using the composite textural descriptions for each school, I created a composite textural description of what the group of participants experienced overall. Lastly, I developed a composite textural-structural description that combined and synthesized the invariant constituents, textural themes, transcript quotations, and structural themes to identify the essence of what and how these eight teachers perceived and experienced the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership.

In the following composite textural-structural description, I used the structural and textural themes to describe how and what the participants experienced and

included direct quotations that best illustrated each theme. In order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, I created pseudonyms. Five primary structural themes emerged as essential elements of how the teacher participants experienced instructional leadership. The following structural themes highlight the experiences of the teacher participants in this study: setting direction for the school, communicating, building interpersonal skills, collaborating with teachers, and providing feedback as the core essences of how they experienced instructional leadership.

### **Core Essence of the Phenomenon at Denistown High School**

The core essence of the phenomenon for Denistown High School is what effective instructional leadership means from these teacher participants' perspective (see Figure 1).

The largest theme to emerge as a core essence of effective instructional leadership at Denistown High School is building interpersonal skills. For these teachers, the principal is visible in the hallways and classrooms and aware of what is taking place in the building. The effective instructional leader takes time to acknowledge or recognize staff for their positive contributions through an informal conversation or a note. Further, the teachers felt encouraged by their instructional leader. They noted the effective instructional leader challenges teachers to try a new instructional method or take on a leadership role. Building trust through communication was another behavior the teachers linked to effective instructional leadership.

The second largest theme that appeared through the interviews with teachers at Denistown High School was collaboration. The teachers at Denistown are department chairs and mentioned an effective instructional leader creates time for department chairs to collaborate through the school's leadership team. Further, the effective instructional leader encourage teacher collaboration at Denistown High. Time is built into the day for teachers to share ideas, feedback, and materials, such as common assessments, with one another through common planning time.

Next, the teachers at Denistown High School perceived the practice of establishing school goals and a shared vision and mission as an essence of effective instructional leadership. They noted an effective instructional leader creates opportunities for teachers to have a say in developing the shared mission and for the instructional leader to set goals to which all the improvement efforts at the school are anchored. The teachers at Denistown detailed being approachable and having an open line of communication. By being open to dialogue, the effective instructional leader builds relationships with staff and gives teachers a voice within the school. Additionally, an effective instructional leader establishes a clear method of communication provides a vehicle to inform staff of the latest information.

The last theme was providing feedback through the evaluation system. An effective instructional leader ensures the feedback is meaningful, detailed, and positive. In addition, the instructional leader includes constructive criticism to assist the teacher who is in need of improvement.

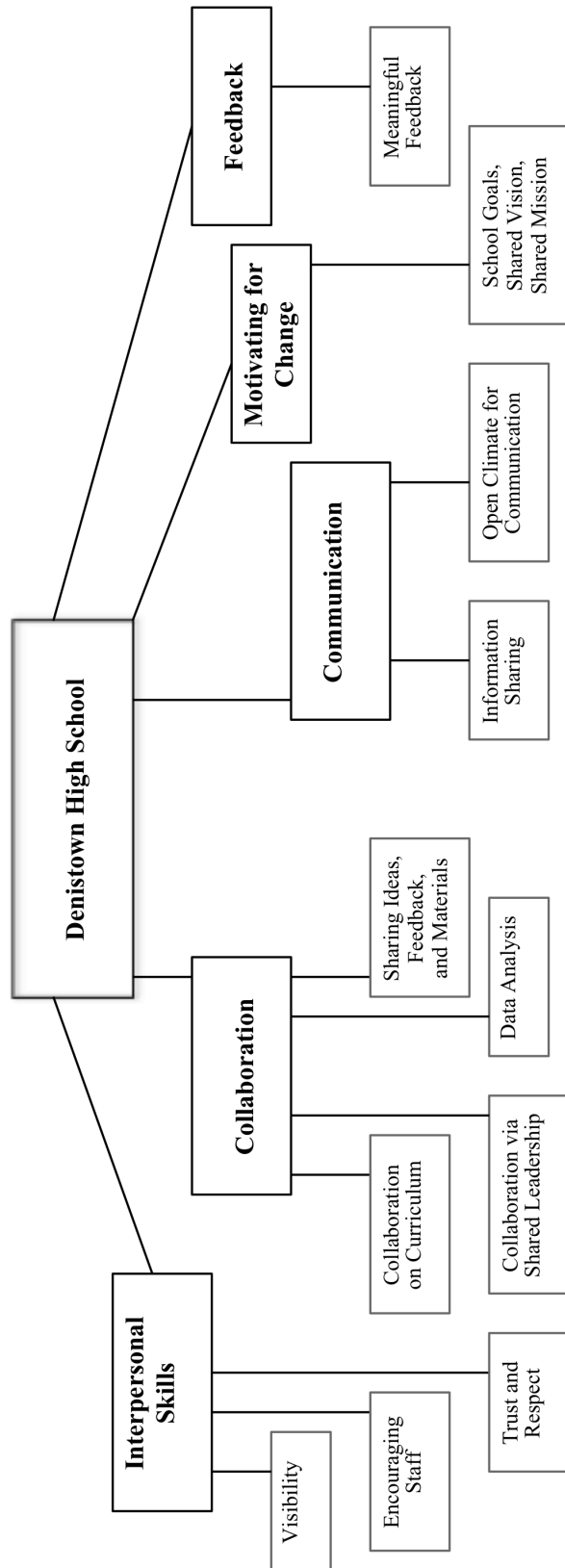


Figure 1. Core Essence of the Phenomenon at Denistown High School

## **Structural Themes for Denistown High School**

### **Structural Theme 1: Interpersonal Skills**

For Mrs. Mercer, an effective instructional leader “must have a relationship with his faculty and staff that’s positive, upbeat, respectful. I think it’s extremely important to gain the respect of your faculty and staff.” Being visible, recognizing staff for positive contributions to the school along with encouraging staff, are detailed in building interpersonal relationships for the teachers at Denistown High School. Relationship building was an important aspect of motivation for Mrs. Salvatore and Mrs. Mercer. Mrs. Salvatore said:

I have a great relationship with the administrative team. Even though I have a great relationship, I try to tell my teachers, “I’m still held to the same criteria, high expectations, that you are.” And my lessons were critiqued. And the bottom line is there’s always something you can improve.

#### **Textural Theme 1a: Visibility**

Establishing a relationship with staff matters to these teachers since visibility holds great importance for the teacher participants at Denistown. Motivating by being visible has many meanings. Mrs. Matthews believed that observing teachers informally is an example of an effective instructional leader taking an interest in the teachers’ work. Teachers want to know that the instructional leader is present in the classrooms to observe teachers’ work outside of an evaluation. Also, visibility relates to being present in the school, in the hallways, and at events.

The teachers stated being visible in the halls and interacting with people is important to effective instructional leadership. Specifically, Mrs. Matthews believed

being present in the classrooms is key “to immerse yourself in classrooms because that’s how your school grows. You see teaching and learning through their [teachers’] eyes.” Further, she stated the instructional leader, as the “supervisor of instruction,” needs to be “immersed with their teachers because that is where the heart of instruction is.”

In order to “be on top of things” and have a finger on the “pulse of the school” in regard to instruction, Mrs. Salvatore, Mrs. Matthews, and Mrs. Koczan identified being visible, through informal classroom visits, as a way to accomplish that goal. These three teachers suggested pop-in visits, or informal observations. Mrs. Salvatore noted, “Popping into classrooms, engaging in conversations with teachers, even if it’s just to say, “Good morning” is important to let teachers know that you are here...and keeps a line of communication open.” Mrs. Matthews experienced having the instructional leader:

Just go in...the more the principals are in classrooms, the less frightening it is for a teacher. If leaders are walking the halls, then they are visible. If they're coming in just once or twice for an observation, I feel like automatically a barrier goes up. But if leaders are walking the halls and they're visible, then when a principal walks into your classroom, you're going to welcome that person, because you should be doing what you're doing every day.

Mrs. Salvatore recalled the instructional leader popping into her classroom, informally, over the course of the school year and appreciated that, on occasion, feedback was offered. Mrs. Koczan expressed a similar sentiment in that the instructional leader builds a relationship if s/he’s “been in my classroom six times this

year and knows what I'm doing" and so the teacher "would be more willing to accept feedback from the instructional leader."

### **Textural Theme 1b: Encouraging Staff**

The Denistown teachers believed in the value of an effective instructional leader encouraging, supporting, and recognizing teachers' work. It demonstrates that the instructional leader is aware of the teaching and the learning occurring in the classroom and the actual teacher him/herself. When a teacher does something positive for the school or students, s/he values receiving recognition. Teachers want to feel appreciated and this is one method to boost morale. Further, encouraging teachers to take advantage of PD opportunities or being involved in collaboration.

Teachers want their strengths acknowledged by the instructional leader. For instance, Mrs. Koczan suggested thanking a teacher for his/her contributions and to be specific about what was done. When a principal sees a certain quality in a teacher, Mrs. Salvatore has observed the instructional leader acknowledging that quality to build that person's confidence. She notes that the effective instructional leader asks that teacher "to be a leader." Mrs. Salvatore noted that the instructional leader:

Recognizes people when they do something for the school and for students.

And that wasn't done before. And unfortunately when you don't do something well, I think it's important that that teacher knows it. You need that communication about what's happening to get feedback.

Further, Mrs. Koczan noted, "Something as little as saying 'thank you' makes people feel appreciated" acts as a motivator. As an instructional leader of her department, Mrs. Koczan detailed that if she along with members of her department,

know that they are appreciated and valued, they are more likely to be motivated to help the next time the principal needs support.

Two of the four teachers believed an effective instructional leader must be open to new ideas but more importantly, build confidence by motivating teachers to try new things. All four at Denistown believed an effective instructional leader encourages teachers to take on challenges, lead something, or participate in a committee. This group of teachers, in particular, has had an array of experiences from sharing ideas about curriculum alignment, professional development opportunities, to the leading of committees. All was made possible though the encouragement of their principal, as the instructional leader of Denistown. Mrs. Salvatore referenced a previous instructional leader who did not encourage her to try new methods. Presently, she noted, “I have been afforded by my administration team the flexibility to try things. And I think that’s huge that I have that opportunity.”

These teachers, as department chairs, referred to a plethora of professional development opportunities offered to them by their instructional leader related to curriculum and comprehending how to effectively utilize the Rhode Island teacher evaluation system. They noted the value of the principal providing them with professional development to implement the teacher evaluation system. The principal provided time and resources for them to understand the intricacies of the system with a representative from the Rhode Island Department of Education. All of the teachers mentioned PD being available during the summer, after school, or at a workshop they have expressed interest in attending. For example, Mrs. Mercer mentioned the instructional leader at Denistown is open to feedback about PD, allowing teachers the



flexibility to discontinue attending something that was not useful. The instructional leader encourages teachers to try something that they believe in. Mrs. Mercer shared an experience at a workshop from the beginning of the semester: “We came back and we're, like, ‘The second one wasn't that great.’ And he said, ‘All right. No problem. You don’t have to. Whatever you want to do, you do it.’”

In Mrs. Mercer and Mrs. Koczan’s experiences, there has “never been a stop sign” but rather they have been encouraged. The instructional leader has had a “go-for-it” approach and is open to suggestions or feedback. Mrs. Mercer provided an example of expressing interest in an open position as an interim administrator. She appreciated that the principal encouraged her to take a chance on the role.

Mrs. Matthews noticed an effective instructional leader ensures all stakeholders are involved in an effort to encourage negative teachers to become more open to participating and collaborating. For instance, Mrs. Matthews shared that an effective instructional leader encourages shared leadership and creates opportunities for teachers share work with one another. She suggested an effective instructional leader invite a teacher to observe a “great instructional strategy” by saying, “I would love if you come in and watch me, and then maybe I could help you create the same dynamic in your classroom.” Mrs. Matthews also noted this is a method to involve teachers by creating a “personalization piece...coming from someone else in your department that you do have a relationship with, or that you feel comfortable with.”

Additionally, for Mrs. Koczan, build confidence within teachers by encouraging the teachers to work together and holding them responsible for that work. When teachers “feel responsibility for things being done, you have accountability,”

according to Mrs. Koczan. She continued, “I think that’s what makes people come together, when everyone feels responsible and everyone feels accountable.” This manifests through an effective instructional leader encouraging teachers to join a committee or attend a workshop, for example.

### **Textural Theme 1c: Trust and Respect**

Trust was a topic shared by each participant at Denistown. They noted that an effective instructional leader develops trust with teachers. One important element of trust is the ability to follow through with advice, ideas for support, or simply following through by doing what was said was going to be done.

An effective instructional leader has trust in the staff and gives trust according to the teachers of Denistown High School. Mrs. Mercer recalled an experience of losing respect and trust in a former leader of the building on account of being singled out in front of peers: “She pointed her finger at me and started yelling at me in the corridor.” As Mrs. Matthews recalled, that particular instructional leader started out as a teacher, so keeping the role of a teacher in perspective is important. Then, “believing in the people that you were chosen to lead” resonated with Mrs. Koczan. Part of demonstrating trust is developing a relationship by maintaining consistent communication. Mrs. Salvatore talked about being “very good with following up on things” as in recognizing someone for something positive they did or perhaps something negative. “If you've done something inappropriate, for whatever it may have been, you will be notified immediately,” per Mrs. Salvatore.

## **Structural Theme 2: Collaboration**

Collaborating made a big impact on the teachers at Denistown. They believed in collaborating with fellow members of the leadership team, the administration at both the building and district levels, in addition to working with their fellow teachers not only in their departments, but across the building in Common Planning Time (CPT).

### **Textural Theme 2a: Collaboration on Curriculum**

The topic of sharing, developing, and/or aligning assessments was a topic that closely aligned to the core practices of collaboration and curriculum. In fact, during the interviews, any experience with curriculum was mentioned in conjunction with some type of collaboration. There was never an instance indicated otherwise. In collaborating with teachers in the building or providing teachers time to collaborate with teachers at different levels, at the elementary (per Mrs. Salvatore) or middle school (per Mrs. Koczan) levels, were important elements noted for effective instructional leadership. For example, the instructional leader developed time for collaboration for teachers to revise curriculum. In revising curriculum, Mrs. Salvatore thought it “goes back to sharing” or collaboration. Mrs. Salvatore and Mrs. Matthews, as department chairs, discussed redesigning curricula in Mathematics and Social Studies with another school district. The principal provided time for them to return to the district to collaborate with teachers to share changes in the curriculum. Teachers noted having “plenty of opportunities for PD with curriculum.” Time was allotted for Mrs. Salvatore and Mrs. Koczan to “realign courses” with Common Core State

Standards and look at NECAP data closely to bring our curriculum to the level it should have been.”

The teachers felt encouraged by their instructional leader to take on reviewing and revising the curriculum collaboratively with teachers in their department. Mrs. Matthews and Mrs. Koczan shared creating a “scope and sequence” in their respective core subject areas.

### **Textural Theme 2b: Collaboration via Shared Leadership**

As department chairs, the teachers at Denistown noted that an effective instructional leader demonstrated shared leadership skills. Their experiences showcased the ways in which collaboration through shared leadership was an element to effective instructional leadership. Delegating work is one component of shared leadership that the teachers have observed. Mrs. Matthews discussed involving teachers in creating a plan to address issues by analyzing data, then involving all in decision-making and problem-solving as part of shared leadership.

Initiating change slowly and ensuring all have a voice to provide feedback are two methods that department chairs, Mrs. Salvatore and Mrs. Koczan experienced with their current principal. Mrs. Koczan believed it was important to bring a teacher who is not involved “into our circle and share with her what we know and what we believe to be true and good for kids.” Mrs. Koczan further emphasized that having a shared vision is “gently changing the mindset of people yet not coming across as aggressive or brassy or a know-it-all.”

Part of the behaviors of shared leadership for Mrs. Matthews and Mrs. Koczan is to ask people to do things, share things with one another, and have confidence in

people. Mrs. Mercer, noted, “Someone who can delegate the jobs is an awesome leader.” Mrs. Matthews promoted shared leadership and has learned how to share responsibilities through working with her current principal. “To get a project completed,” teachers “collaborate and communicate together,” Mrs. Matthews stated. Further, Mrs. Mathews believed effective instructional leaders provide teachers with an opportunity to lead.

### **Textural Theme 2c: Data Analysis**

According to Mrs. Salvatore, teachers at Denistown High constantly use data and it is “what pushes our instruction.” All teachers at Denistown referenced analyzing school-wide data such as graduation rates, graduation portfolio data, and NECAP scores. Denistown High School’s leadership team has reviewed school-wide data to “pull kids who need help, support, and remediate them as soon as the reports” are available, per Mrs. Salvatore. Collectively, the leadership team is proactive by reviewing students’ test scores from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade to identify those at risk to determine areas of need.

For Mrs. Mercer and Mrs. Matthews, who teach subjects not tested on NECAP, they noted using data within their departments the least. Mrs. Matthews felt that she does not have much experience with data because her subject area, Social Studies, “is not a tested area.” They did, however, reference using school-wide data to provide support for seniors struggling to graduate from the high school. Mrs. Mercer noted that data is “an area that we’re getting into [but] I don’t see too much data myself, unless it’s the NECAP scores. I think that’s something we’re going into, but we’re not quite there yet.” Mrs. Mercer detailed that the primary goal when examining

students' NECAP scores and progress on completing the portfolio for graduation is for the leadership team "to figure out how to get these kids to proficiency."

### **Textural Theme 2d: Sharing Ideas, Feedback, and Materials**

All teachers detailed experiences with sharing ideas, feedback, and materials with one another through department meetings or CPT, in which a mix of disciplines is represented. "We've been directed to share student work," said Mrs. Salvatore. She noted that the instructional leader has been:

Very positive in formative assessments and communicating that to teachers.

So at the end of the class, ask, "How do you know students learned what you taught?" So those quick formative assessments have helped us attain high expectations, because we want students to have high achievement.

In collaborating on formative assessments, for example, Mrs. Salvatore experienced CPT as being a "diverse group" from which to obtain ideas. She believed that "the more we can share, the better we can do our job." Mrs. Mercer noted that working with teachers during CPT has "brought in so many great ideas to share, and then I'll bring it back to the department. We are constantly working with one another." Mrs. Mercer and Mrs. Matthews reflected on collaborating and concluded that if teachers teach the same subject, it would behoove instructional leaders to encourage teachers to "share best practices with one another." Mrs. Koczan further shared that "encouraging collaboration, is key with a good instructional leader.... But in my opinion you need to share best practice because you need to find out what works and you need to get other people's input." Part of sharing ideas and materials is seeking feedback and thus, Mrs. Koczan provided an example of how CPT functions:

So you might have a math teacher, a language teacher, an English teacher.

And, you know, we evaluate and look at student work from other departments and give teachers feedback on lessons. So feedback is sort of at the core of who we are.

Another element to collaboration is the collaboratively developing common assessments. There was a process designed for teachers to develop, validate, and calibrate common assessments at Denistown High. All teachers detailed experiences with collaboratively creating common assessments and ensuring they are aligned to the curriculum. The instructional leader initiated the idea of creating departmental exams and the use of common assessments. Mrs. Salvatore and Mrs. Mercer mentioned that the instructional leader has provided time for teachers collaboratively validate and calibrate the common tasks during either department meetings or CPT.

### **Structural Theme 3: Communication**

Communication takes place through informal conversations and emails. Essential to keeping staff in-the-know is to share information about school issues, new initiatives, and upcoming events. Further, to encourage open communication, listening to teachers is an important component. Being accessible and allowing for an “open line of communication” creates an environment in which the school leader is approachable and willing to listen. Having an open door policy for communication with the school leader fosters relationships with staff and allows teachers to have a voice.

### **Textural Theme 3a: Information Sharing**

Mrs. Mercer and Mrs. Koczan explained the instructional leader makes sure to communicate through email in an effort to share information. There, information about new PD opportunities can be found, as well as on the website. The superintendent, as another type of instructional leader, has also communicated with teachers about PD opportunities. Mrs. Mercer noted that the superintendent has “emailed us about the new grading program.”

Per teachers Mrs. Salvatore and Mrs. Matthews, an instructional leader shares current “literature and research articles” to support using strategies connected to the school’s goals. Mrs. Matthews discussed that the principal is always reading books about teaching and learning: “When he finds powerful passages or powerful readings that really center on, on teaching and learning, he puts copies in our mailboxes.” Additionally, Mrs. Matthews found the instructional leader to encourage teachers:

To keep up on your reading. And when we have conversations, he’s always bringing in your most profound authors in talking about the issue. So I feel that keeping up to date with your research in education is key. It’s reading, reading, reading, reading, and bringing that information and that knowledge to your teachers too. I enjoy that.

Beyond providing research, provide the reasoning behind why an initiative has passed or a change has been made for staff. The teachers at Denistown noted that they wanted their school leader to keep staff informed about new programs or initiatives and to explain the purpose of those programs. Mrs. Matthews stated this “helps teachers understand also what goes on at the state level of education, and even, like,



the district level, where sometimes teachers don't have that opportunity." Mrs.

Matthews also revealed that each meeting has a purpose, while there may be many:

When you leave those meetings you understand why they need to exist, and the importance of it, because it's the opportunity for administration, for teachers and other groups, to get together and have conversations about the school.

And that's how your school is going to move forward. If you don't have the collaborative piece, in my opinion, schools stay stagnant. And that's why, again, shared leadership is important, because one, two, three people can't do that.

Another form of communication mentioned by Mrs. Koczan is the leadership team itself, which consists of members of the administrative team, such as the principal and assistant principal, in addition to the department chairs. In keeping teachers informed and on task, Mrs. Salvatore recalled that the principal has a set agenda with information and topics for discussion, such as "student work, teacher evaluation, and NECAP scores." She noted, "If they [the school's administrators] want something disseminated they would come to the leadership team, and then we would disseminate the information to our department." As an instructional leader for her department, Mrs. Koczan thought that one of the toughest things has been trying to figure out "how to gently share some information that doesn't overwhelm. So you have to learn how to share things in small chunks and things that are going to be manageable."

### **Textural Theme 3b: Open Climate for Communication**

For these teachers, communication is also about having what they refer to as an “open-door policy” for discussion and feedback. For example, Mrs. Salvatore, Mrs. Mercer, and Mrs. Koczan shared that teachers are able to offer feedback on professional development (PD) and have a voice in the PD they would like to see offered at Denistown. Further, Mrs. Matthews suggested giving teachers an opportunity to have “input in developing the school’s mission or designing curriculum.” Allow teachers to share feedback about changes as a way to ensure teachers feel their opinion or voice matters, as “they are part of a team” making decisions for the betterment of the school, according to Mrs. Koczan. The principal has encouraged Mrs. Mercer to “email or call” because they [school leaders] are open to new ideas. From Mrs. Mercer’s experience, she is “impressed” with the district’s leadership and felt that they have been “willing to, to expand, to listen, to do anything for what I believe for my staff.” Mrs. Matthews has gone to the “administrative team for advice” and noted, “My principal has just a great way of communicating with people. He never makes anyone feel like they've done something wrong. What he does is he presents issues where you're forced to reflect.”

Mrs. Matthews’s experiences are similar. If she wants to make a change, she ensures she has a solution or “some sort of proposal that has evidence to say this is how” she would like to make the change. For Mrs. Matthews, effective instructional leaders must be approachable so “when having conversations with them, whether it’s about my teaching or whether it’s about my role as a department chair, feedback is always, is always honest. But it’s presented to me in a way where I can really learn on

what I might have done wrong.” Mrs. Koczan noted the different ways teachers at her school may offer suggestions:

Bring it up to the school improvement team, you could bring it up to your department chair and you could send an email. It feels like they have a voice, I think if everyone feels like they're a part of and they're not isolated from, that makes everything function better. And it allows us to really make good decisions in the best interest of kids when everybody's on, relatively, the same page.

#### **Structural Theme 4: Motivating for Change**

Setting goals for the school emerged as a theme for the teachers at Denistown. It was important for them to see school goals include a shared vision and mission communicated with the staff. An instructional leader who holds high expectations for student achievement merged into the core practice of setting directions, as well.

#### **Textural Theme 4a: School Goals, Shared Vision, Shared Mission**

Per Mrs. Salvatore, Mrs. Matthews, and Mrs. Koczan, the principal always has an agenda, “Whatever is on the agenda, the number one goal is student improvement, student achievement.” Mrs. Matthews noted that she keeps kids in mind when making decisions since “what you're being asked to do is important. It's significant because you're doing this for kids, and it's what's best for kids.” Working together on developing a mission is elemental for Mrs. Koczan as she noted, an effective instructional leader:

Has a mission in mind and shares that mission, but doesn't say, “This is how we're going to get there.” Says things more like, “This is what I see

happening. How do you see us getting there, and what can you bring to that vision?”

In addition, both Mrs. Salvatore and Mrs. Matthews remarked that the principal ensures all students are held to high standards, the curriculum is viable and that teachers are “here for the same mission.” Mrs. Matthews then specifically stated having a vision and involving everyone’s voice:

I think an effective school leader needs to have a vision that centers around a mission. A vision, core values and beliefs, 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations of student learning. I believe an effective instructional leader needs to involve teachers, parents, community members in the decision-making of the school, where everybody has a voice, everybody can contribute to what’s best for kids.

In setting direction, Mrs. Matthews also shared the instructional leader is in classrooms:

Working with kids and teachers and providing your teachers professional development opportunities to grow. Encouraging your teachers to observe other classrooms, to really collaborate formally and informally with their colleagues. And that’s the vision I feel that every effective instructional leader should have. Your teachers and your students are the core of your building.

### **Structural Theme 5: Feedback**

At Denistown High, each of the department chairs had experiences to share with receiving feedback from the instructional leader of the building.

### **Textural Theme 5a: Meaningful Feedback**

Giving feedback that was linked to the observed lesson and recognizing positive points were meaningful to the teachers of Denistown. Additionally, an effective instructional leader provides honest feedback containing references to areas of need with tangible ideas for improvement, per Mrs. Koczan.

Inviting teachers to converse about an observation, according to Mrs. Salvatore, is one method for an effective instructional leader to provide feedback. While meeting with a teacher to offer feedback, Mrs. Salvatore emphasized staying focused, as deviating from the topic devalues the importance of the evaluation, and using the rubric as a frame for discussion. She referenced an effective instructional leader includes positive comments in the feedback and addresses negative behaviors with constructive criticism. Mrs. Salvatore further suggested the instructional leader model a strategy or “provide an opportunity to link with another teacher” for support. Mrs. Mercer shared similar sentiments, “This is what you need to improve on. This is the help you need to seek. These are the people that you need to see. Go and sit down in a classroom. Learn.” She noted that if a teacher needs help, the district provides it. She suggested not “making any judgments against someone’s negativity, and turning that negative into a positive.”

Mrs. Koczan relayed how teachers, much like students, appreciate feedback. Mrs. Koczan also mentioned that the model of evaluation is “not supposed to be a ‘gotcha’ model.” Yet, teachers have perceived it as such so the effective instructional leader needs to make an effort to “break that rumor, that stereotype.” Providing constructive criticism is essential, as well, Mrs. Koczan continued, “I’ve found that

it's really a disservice if you sugar-coat advice, because they don't really learn from it...I just feel like if you're open and honest with people, you're going to get better results.”

### **Core Essence of the Phenomenon at Bayside High School**

The core essence of the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership for the teachers at Bayside High School contains five structural themes (see).

The third theme for the teachers at Bayside is communication and being accessible for communication. The teachers sought to see explanations about new initiatives and changes from the instructional leader. Moreover, the teachers at Bayside believed an effective instructional leader welcomes interaction and dialogue with teachers thus allowing teachers to share their opinions and provide feedback. In particular, the teachers mentioned allowing teachers to have a voice in opportunities for professional development. They experienced their instructional leader at Bayside checking for the “pulse” of the school often by asking for feedback about what is happening and how the teachers feel.

The major theme was building interpersonal skills at Bayside. Teachers suggested the principal be visible by visiting classrooms informally. Through communication, the teachers suggested an effective instructional leader informs staff of changes and provides support to make the changes. In addition, it is important to building trust with teachers by communicating clearly and having faith in the staff.

The second theme to emerge was collaboration. The teachers discussed having opportunities to collaboratively revise curriculum. An effective instructional leader encourages teachers to develop, assess, and analyze the data from the common

assessments. The participants from Bayside further remarked that teachers collaborate to share ideas and work on common assessments during department meetings or common planning time.

The last theme noted was providing fair and meaningful feedback through the evaluation system. An effective instructional leader ensures the feedback is specific, positive, and includes information on ways to improve. The teachers at Bayside High School felt the system has a “gotcha” feel to it as it is based on a single classroom observation.

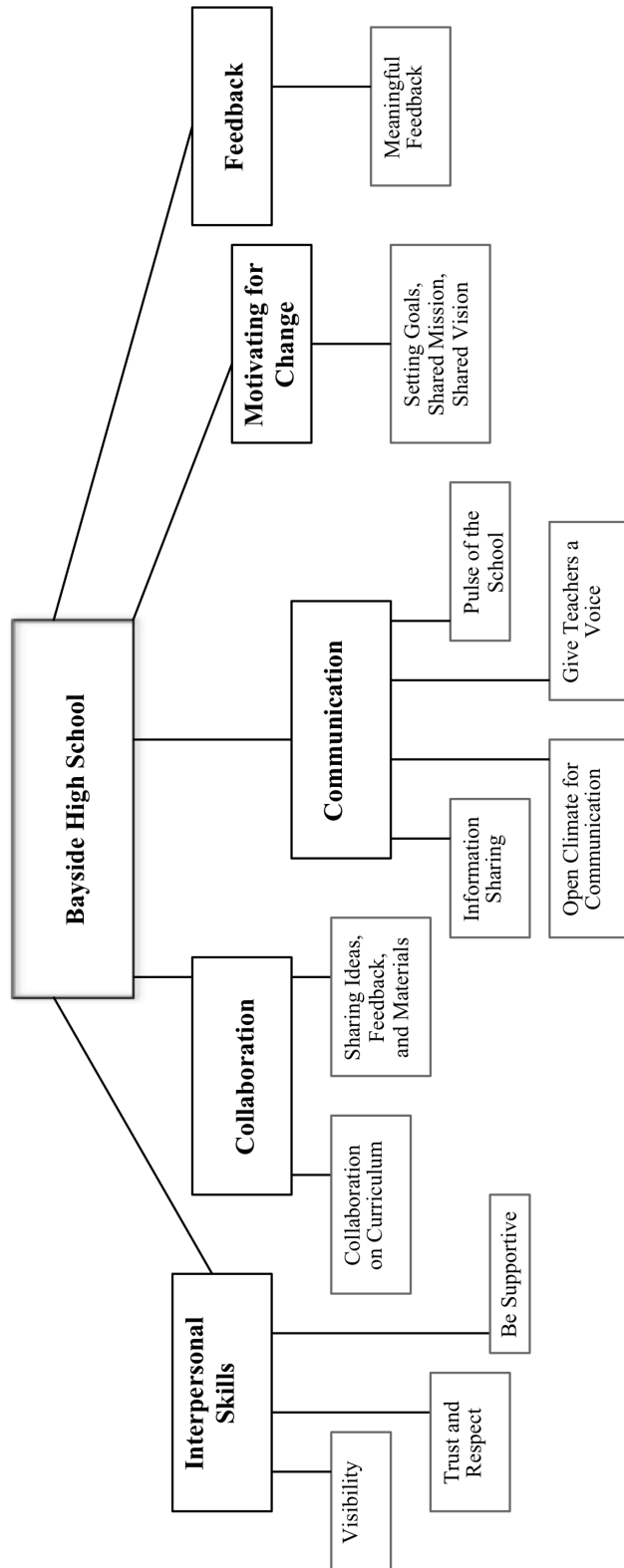


Figure 2. Core Essence of the Phenomenon at Bayside High School



## **Structural Themes for Bayside High School**

### **Structural Theme 1: Interpersonal Skills**

At Bayside, the teachers shared several behaviors of effective instructional leaders, which encompass building interpersonal skills with staff. Each teacher referenced being visible as essential to effective instructional leadership in addition to working with staff to encourage buy-in of new initiatives. The behaviors of building trust, being flexible, and providing support were of importance at Bayside, as well.

#### **Textural Theme 1a: Visibility**

The teachers believed an effective instructional leader is visible in the classrooms for informal, “pop-in visits.” Mr. Archer mentioned being visible by walking around the building, going through the rooms casually. Mr. Vieira stated:

Am I going to judge somebody’s career on a 45-minute snapshot, or do I pop into that classroom every once and a while and see what’s happening? You know, I think that’s much more effective than what could amount to a dog and pony show.

#### **Textural Theme 1b: Trust and Respect**

According to the teachers at Bayside, an instructional leader builds trust and follows through with what was said. Negative experiences with trust were shared from the teachers at Bayside. Mr. Leet and Mr. Archer both expressed backing up what is said and not being insincere. Mr. Archer did not appreciate seeing an email praising how “we’re together as a team” but the next email referenced “we’ve got to double the work.” Instead, he suggested following up the communication with actions

that support the new changes. According to Mr. Leet, an effective instructional leader builds trust on a personal level. He notes teachers want to trust that an instructional leader who gives the teachers his/her “word on something, that it’s going to have value.”

Mr. Vieira, Mr. Leet and Mr. Archer referred to “bullying behavior” as the opposite of building trust. They reported feeling disrespected and that the instructional leadership appears to have a lack of faith in staff. This disrespect, according the Bayside’s teachers, has been demonstrated through the feedback teachers received through the evaluation system. In their view, this has lead to “low morale” among teachers. Mr. Vieira stated:

Obviously, another negative is principals don’t have faith in their staff, look at test scores and say, “Okay. Test scores are where they are. This staff is horrible...So we have to address the bad teachers in this building.”

### **Textural Theme 1c: Be Supportive**

The teacher participants at Bayside noted an effective instructional leader entails “having people do what you want without forcing them, but having them believe it is the ‘right thing,’” per Mr. Leet. Teachers are not necessarily going to be “discouraged or disgruntled if someone doesn’t agree with what they want,” said Mr. Leet, but want to be heard and so the instructional leader needs to be “approachable and fair.” Honesty is a major factor for all teachers, Mr. Leet suggested being “honest, rather than you try to puff us up and then take us back down again.” Mr. Archer wanted to believe that he is being supported, rather than judged. He gave an example of hearing, “I’m there with you...I will help you with it” as a way to “ease the tension

and help the buy-in” from his department chair. Mr. Archer suggested the “administrator let the teacher know that they got their back” instead of taking opposite stance with sentiments like, “You can't give me your problems, 'cause I got my own problems.” He would prefer the instructional leaders to “let the teachers know more that they're on their side to improve the situation and it may just make teachers a little less stressed.”

Further, Mr. Vieira stressed supporting teachers who have not had good observations:

If you've identified a teacher that is substandard, then you go to the process of helping that teacher get better. There are tremendous supports in place to support struggling educators. It's built into the contract. You know, we've got a teacher support plan where it's designed to provide support for teachers that are struggling. Basically it's up to administration to develop a plan that will help that teacher get better.

## **Structural Theme 2: Collaboration**

The teachers at Bayside High School all shared examples of collaboration. They focused on collaborating to adjust curriculum at the school and with teachers from other districts. They noted that time has been set aside for them to share ideas and materials along with developing and analyzing common assessments.

### **Textural Theme 2a: Collaboration on Curriculum**

Teachers detailed the opportunities for teachers at Bayside to redesign/align curriculum with one another in the same subject area. Mr. Leet and Mrs. Lavoie-Perez noted there has been some curriculum work done in conjunction with other districts, as

well. Mr. Leet mentioned an effective instructional leader provided opportunities for teachers to collaboratively develop a common curriculum. Per Mr. Vieira and Mr. Archer, “we've created scope and sequence within our department” by reviewing it together.

Two teachers noted a negative experience occurred during the current school year related to modifying curriculum in the middle of the school year with little reasoning, support, or communication from the instructional leaders. In an effort to avoid frustration, Mr. Vieira suggested an effective instructional leader is “flexible with content areas and redesigning curriculum with regard to SLOs and teacher evaluation.” It is best to “have teachers involved” so they “can work toward a solution together,” said Mr. Vieira.

### **Textural Theme 2b: Sharing Ideas, Feedback, and Materials**

Each teacher referenced an effective instructional leader encourages collaboration. As a former middle school teacher, Mr. Archer mentioned middle school teachers have more opportunity to collaborate. For Mr. Archer, the effective instructional leader is one who reinforces that “we are all in this together.” He appreciates a school leader who encourages working together. Mrs. Lavoie-Perez, as the other classroom teacher, also spoke about collaboration within her department. The two department chairs also noted an effective instructional leader creates opportunities for collaboration with teachers, as they have been afforded such at Bayside. Specifically, Mr. Leet noted the instructional leader has ensured there is time to “create assessments or explore the curriculum.” Furthermore, carving out time

within the school day to ensure that “we’re all on the same page, so we talk a little bit about what’s expected in the upcoming quarter,” per Mr. Archer.

Specifically sharing ideas with and among teachers emerged as an element of collaboration for all teacher participants. Mr. Archer and Mrs. Lavoie-Perez discussed having opportunities to share ideas through informal conversations, common planning time, or department time. Also, the sharing of materials is a source of pride and it is unnecessary to recreate materials for a class that two teachers each teach according to Mrs. Lavoie-Perez. During these informal discussions, colleagues develop ideas and assessments, talk about what is or is not working, and peer edit. According to Mrs. Lavoie-Perez, her department shares often, she noted:

Sometimes my friend will walk in and, you know, she’ll say, “What are you doing today?” And I’ll say, “Oh, we were doing something with films. We were looking at three different scenes from...today happened to be ‘Hamlet.’” And she goes, “Oh, well, I’m doing ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream.’” She said, “Maybe I could look at yours.” And, “Oh, sure.”

In addition, Mr. Leet noted sharing formative assessments within his department while Mrs. Lavoie-Perez mentioned sharing useful materials with fellow teachers and even sharing work with the department chair. Each of these teachers detailed common assessments in connection to collaboration as discussed with the leadership team. The teachers in Mr. Leet’s department are accustomed to working together to develop and analyze the results of common assessments.

To explain how common assessments are used, Mr. Vieira remarked, “We identify the top three questions that students struggled with. We collected all that

data. And because everything is common, we were able to identify an issue and then we were able to work on it.” Per Mr. Leet, having common assessments, such as exams and portfolio projects, are simply insufficient, yet he noted “the common assessment piece really helps teachers to talk to each other, because teachers are not used to doing that.”

The effective instructional leader makes time for teachers to work on commonality for assessments like mid-terms and finals, according to each of these teachers. There is time to collaborate for developing these common assessments aligned to the course’s standards. Further, the two classroom teachers noted having time to validate the assessments and calibrate the scoring. Then, they meet to analyze students’ results, as well.

### **Structural Theme 3: Communication**

The teachers at Bayside High School highlighted the essentials of providing clear communication to staff as an effective instructional leader. Each teacher mentioned concerns about the type of communication utilized at Bayside. They recalled the quality of some communication and stated receiving little information from the instructional leader on changes mandated in the middle of the year. Creating an open climate for communication with staff and providing opportunities for their voice to be heard resonated with the teachers at Bayside.

#### **Textural Theme 3a: Information Sharing**

A form of communication mentioned at Bayside High School was sharing the latest information through the school principal’s weekly email. The instructional leader outlines the “nuts and bolts” such as upcoming events and programs at the

school. In addition, included in the emails is “technical stuff for staff, professional development sign ups, goings on, and schedule changes” per Mr. Archer.

Clear communication mattered to teachers, Mr. Vieira, Mr. Archer, and Mrs. Lavoie-Perez . Mr. Archer felt it was important for an effective instructional leader to provide information about new initiatives in small chunks for gradual implementation, as teachers may feel overwhelmed with too much upfront. He noted, “For change to be real and solid, in a way, it has to be gradual because you change what the effect will be. If there’s too much change, then you find out that wasn’t a good idea.”

Negative comments emerged from these teachers in relation to communication about changes made in the middle of the year with little notice or explanation by the principal. Mr. Archer shared an anecdote about a short email teachers received regarding a change, stating, “We have to do this.” Mr. Archer remarked, “Now...starting tomorrow we got to do it differently?” The teachers at Bayside noted that administration has their reasons but that it was communicated with short notice. Mr. Vieira and Mrs. Lavoie-Perez referenced not appreciating poor communication about mid-year changes. Mrs. Lavoie-Perez specifically shared:

The principal likes to see copies of the mid-terms... and I know just from conversations, that she wanted to try and make them maybe more PARCC-like. But it was kind of last minute, which kind of happens to us sometimes. And then at the last minute, “Do you think we can change it and make it more PARCC-like?” Well, it might be difficult because that’s not really where we led the kids in instruction.

For Mr. Vieira, he noted that the curriculum constantly changes because of standards like GSEs and then the Common Core State Standards. Mr. Vieira, said:

So it's in constant flux. So we're told that what we're doing is wrong and we have to change it. And then we'll be told what we're doing is wrong and then we have to change it again. So it's mind-boggling because things, you know, they change so much.

Mr. Archer would prefer if instructional leaders were honest in conveying information for the staff about changes and have a plan by sharing with teachers why something is changing. Mr. Archer suggested an effective instructional leader shared the positives and be honest, saying, "Look. I don't know what they're doing here. But I need to do this. And we're going to do the best we can, but at the same time I'm fighting for you."

### **Textural Theme 3b: Open Climate for Communication**

For all teacher participants at Bayside, by being accessible, an effective instructional leader welcomes interactions with teachers through conversation as a strategy to build motivation. In particular, three of these teachers expressed discussing new initiatives prior to implementation in order to obtain buy-in and feedback as a motivator. Mr. Vieira described seeking feedback about changes that have been recently made rather than "keep throwing more and more at it" before knowing if the changes are effective. Further, Mr. Leet said that having that "buy-in is a process that has to start with a conversation."



### **Textural Theme 3c: Give Teachers a Voice**

In particular, the teachers at Bayside want an effective instructional leader to be open to listening to their opinions about policy changes. Moreover, all noted the importance of listening to teachers' ideas for professional development options and feedback about initiatives. One instance mentioned by Mr. Archer was an effective instructional leader provides feedback on what is observed and obtains feedback from teachers on a new initiative or changes made. Mr. Vieira suggested obtaining feedback from department heads and educators, "Whereas things tend to work best when you get teachers involved and you get feedback." Mr. Archer wanted to hear that the instructional leader is working with the teachers and "not just passing it off to them [the teachers]." He wanted to know that there is a chance for the teachers to "speak their mind a bit and "maybe some of their questions would get answered."

According to Mr. Vieira and Mrs. Leet, the department chairs, the leadership team "works with administration and has honest conversations." For instance, Mr. Vieira noted, "The good thing about having a leadership team is sometimes principals come up with wacky ideas. And we're able to temper some of those wacky ideas." Mr. Leet believed the "department heads bring back really candid feedback about the troops... what's happening on the ground. We bring that back up... We don't always agree with each other. But there's a lot of very good dialogue that happens." For example, through conversation, the team decided to develop PD to improve relationships with collaborative teachers. Mr. Vieira noted, "The Collaborative Couples PD will help improve the relationship between those two teachers, those professionals. We've had a wide variety of professional development opportunities

like the norms of collaborative couple.” While the teachers felt that PD is encouraged, Mrs. Lavoie-Perez acknowledged the Collaborative Couples PD was only available to certain teachers and was unsure about how those teachers were selected for the PD workshop.

All participants stated that teachers at Bayside High do not have enough say in what PD is offered. Mr. Archer believed teachers want to be heard and “they want to make sure that people who are making the decisions are listening to all the parties before they make the decisions,” rather than mandating a change. Mr. Archer referenced having more “relevant” PD would be appreciated and further suggested having “differentiated” offerings depending on what the teacher needs or are tailored to the teacher’s content area. Mrs. Lavoie-Perez felt the PD should be “cohesive” and has not appreciated short-lived initiatives that involved PD, “plotting the roster, didn’t stick.” Mr. Leet suggested continuing to offer “internal PD with staff leading” it.

### **Textural theme 3d: Pulse of the School**

Lastly, a form of creating an open climate for communication and giving teachers a voice is the strategy of asking for the “pulse” of the school by the instructional leader. Three of the teachers noted an effective instructional leader wants to know the “pulse” of the school. At Bayside, they experienced the principal asking, “What’s going on?” and “How do people feel?” They have observed the instructional leader visiting professional development workshops to check the “pulse.” Mrs. Lavoie-Perez noted the principal is “always asking about getting a ‘pulse’ and talks a lot about data and the Common Core.” For Mr. Leet and Mr. Archer, it is important

for an effective instructional leader to be aware of what is happening in many different areas throughout the school and to “be on their [sic] game.”

#### **Structural Theme 4: Motivating for Change**

At Bayside High School, the teacher participants discussed an effective instructional leader sets goals related to school improvement and establishes a shared mission.

##### **Textural Theme 4a: Setting Goals, Shared Vision, Shared Mission**

Mr. Leet and Mr. Archer noted the importance of an effective instructional leader setting goals with a streamlined focus for improving teaching and learning. Mrs. Lavoie-Perez mentioned the importance of having expectations of teachers. Yet, Mr. Vieira and Mr. Leet described frustrations with instructional leaders who have expectations that are “based on the latest and greatest” or “randomly throwing out techniques and philosophies.” Only Mr. Vieira noted the importance of having high expectations for student achievement, particularly for graduation. Mr. Archer expressed having a shared mission to communicate with staff. Specifically, Mr. Archer believed an effective instructional leader is honest in sharing the big picture or plan for the year and stressed, “Straight honesty where you feel like you’re getting the ‘real scoop’ about where we are going.” He discussed teachers needing stability and an effective instructional leader does not change the plan for the year midstream without necessary support. Mr. Leet shared the importance of an effective instructional leader articulating the end goal when describing an initiative s/he seeks to implement. He gave an example of identifying a gap in literacy through analyzing NECAP scores during a leadership team meeting with a focus question: “What do we

want to achieve at the end?” Mr. Leet stated that the leadership team determined raising NECAP scores as a “very concrete and simplistic” goal. To support that statement of being simplistic, Mr. Archer appreciated hearing, “This is the game plan. This is what we're going to focus on this year.”

To elicit participation in meeting the schools’ goals, Mr. Vieira and Mrs. Lavoie-Perez suggested an effective instructional leader motivates staff by being open to new ideas and flexible. Obtain buy-in for a new initiative by “selling the concept you want to get done for buy-in,” per Mr. Leet. Further, Mr. Archer indicated the importance of “explaining why and how teachers will benefit” from the changes. Mr. Archer thought an effective instructional leader needs to not only to provide information on the new initiative, but has to “understand where the teacher is coming from and try to sell it to them.” Then, the teachers stressed explaining the purpose and intent of the new expectations. To support obtaining buy-in, Mr. Leet believed “you need to really sell it” yet obtain “lots of input from a lot of people.” To further enhance the explanation of selling changes, Mr. Leet said, “Good instructional leadership dovetails with leaders who are able to get teachers to buy into what you're selling. To get teachers to buy into the ideas that you have, and why they are better than what they're doing.” Mr. Archer shared a negative experience about staff “losing commitment when an administrator tells them ‘it’ll be different next year’ or when they make a change mid year.” He underscored that teachers “don’t want to make that 100% commitment because they might have to change or do a 180 in the middle” [of the year].

## **Structural Theme 5: Feedback**

Each teacher at Bayside had comments to share about his/her experiences with receiving feedback from the instructional leader. They stressed the importance of providing fair, honest, and meaningful data for all teachers after an observation.

### **Textural Theme 5a: Meaningful Feedback**

Department chairs, Mr. Vieira and Mr. Leet, referenced being fair and firm with feedback, but not making the evaluation process a “gotcha” model. Additionally, the two classroom teachers revealed the evaluation system seemed to be more of a “gotcha” model than one that fairly reflects their teaching practice. In turn, their experiences with the instructional leaders who have conducted and scored the observations have been negative. They believed the low scores for teachers’ evaluation have led to low morale among teachers throughout the building. They believed an effective instructional leader needs to be fair in writing the evaluations, rather than noting that the “Nobody’s getting a 4,” or “We’re giving out too many 3s,” per Mr. Vieira. Further, Mr. Vieira has found “principals to be very hesitant to give out 3s and 4s because they feel that it does not accurately reflect test scores within a building.”

Mr. Archer mentioned, “Making a couple official visits through the year, I don’t think really gives an administrator really a view of what’s going on in there.” Further, Mr. Archer believed a one-time view is not reflective of his abilities and is a snapshot of his teaching, not encompassing all that he does with the students on any given day. The one time observation for the one time rating is thought to be unfair. At this school, Mr. Archer noted that evaluations tend to be judgmental. Mr. Vieira

and Mr. Archer suggested that an effective instructional leader provides feedback to teachers on informal classroom visits and collects data on these types of informal visits to spot trends. Mr. Archer suggested an instructional leader consider walking through “five rooms” and identify trends. If something negative was observed, say, “I’m seeing a trend. I have some data here. Well, I’m going to just have a little talk or maybe I’ll sit down for a class in that one class.” Mr. Archer further notes the effective instructional leader shares what was observed and asks the teacher to provide his/her thoughts about what took place during the observation. Mr. Archer noted this conversation is not meant to “berate” the teacher but rather to obtain an explanation.

Mr. Leet noted there have been mixed messages from school’s instructional leaders. Through emails, teachers have received positive messages about how proud the school leaders are of them, but yet teachers have been disheartened by the scores they have received on their evaluations. Mr. Leet suggested an effective instructional leader may need to modify the process especially with scoring. He believed teachers “only look at the numerical scores to see how they fared instead of reviewing the ‘priority feedback.’” He noted feedback is written to reflect the areas of positive recognition and areas that need to be further addressed or improved.

Mrs. Lavoie-Perez shared that the feedback is well received from her department chair, as he teaches the course and knows what to look for. Mrs. Lavoie-Perez thought that the principal observed “student behavior more than instruction and might not know exactly what you’re doing with instruction.” Mrs. Lavoie-Perez felt the feedback from the principal is not something she believes to be particularly useful and/or reflective of what she is able to do in the classroom. She believed that the

observation process would be better established if the feedback came from someone with experience teaching her particular subject.

With relation to obtaining feedback on an evaluation, Mr. Vieira detailed a negative sentiment at Bayside that teachers have expressed to him about scores on specific components of the teacher evaluation system being unfair. Mr. Vieira continued by referencing how the school administration has been scoring teachers using the teacher evaluation guide: “We're black and white, where we look in this booklet and say, ‘Okay, the students didn't self-correct each other.’” He suggested “living in the gray” and being flexible in evaluating teachers.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

The two high schools present a set of unique viewpoints of experiences with effective instructional leadership. I collected interview data from eight teachers, four at each school, with at least 13 years of teaching experience over a period of three weeks in January 2014. All were classroom teachers, but six currently hold the position of department chair as well. The four teachers at Denistown High School had positive experiences with current school leadership while the teachers at Bayside High School discussed two negative experiences. Their varied stories comprise the rich experiences for this study. The interview participants shared much of the same structural themes regarding the core practices of effective instructional leadership allowing me to reach a saturation point with the eight interviews. Through sharing the teachers' perspective, the reader will discover how these individuals have made sense of their experiences with what they determined to be effective instructional leadership. The concepts they shared were reflective of the core practices of instructional leadership noted in the literature. Through the in-depth interviews, the teachers shared their perspective and experiences of what they believed to be representative of effective instructional leaders. Each of the core practices were mentioned in some capacity, in fact most were noted in connection to other core practices.



## **Summary of the Study**

My interest in developing this study blossomed out of observing varying styles of instructional leadership throughout my career as a teacher and administrator. Those experiences as a teacher and later, administrator shaped my understanding of effective instructional leadership. As an administrator, I observed teachers experience instructional leadership in a unique manner and wanted to explore what their perceptions and understanding of effective instructional leadership embodied.

The teacher participants' varied experiences provided rich details for this study by shedding light on the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership. The data presented in this study offers a glimpse into the varied perspectives of eight teachers. In some capacity, each of the core practices for effective instructional leadership were noted by the teachers throughout the interviews. A few teachers placed more importance on some practices than others. The structural themes at both high schools tied into the core practice of motivation through three avenues: motivating for change, communication, and interpersonal skills. Also present were the themes of collaboration and providing feedback. These themes highlight how these participants viewed principals who exhibit effective instructional leadership skills. Lastly, the teacher participants' experiences and anecdotes aligned well to each of the findings in the literature of Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) and Leithwood et al. (2008).

### **Motivation for Change**

Over half of the horizontalized statements relating to the teacher participants' experiences with effective instructional leadership were linked to the core practice of motivation.

The findings indicated it was essential for the effective instructional leader to establish a relationship with teachers, which linked well to being visible, and establishing open communication, trust, and respect in both schools. This behavior carried over into many themes. Additionally, building relationships with staff was a positive experience for the teachers at Denistown as they felt their principal encouraged them to take on challenging tasks and has built trust with them. Lashway (2002) referenced building trust as an element of motivating teachers to improve their practice. Then, to support the research of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Marzano et al. (2005), and Glatthorn et al. (2012), the Denistown teachers noted an effective instructional leader rewards and recognizes teachers for positive contributions as a form of motivation. For Bayside, the teachers' experiences with building trust and feeling supported were not as positive. Having clear communication was one key to feeling supported at Bayside, though. Marzano et al. (2005) recognized creating a climate for communication in being available or accessible for teachers. The participants at Denistown thought their instructional leader created opportunities for informal interactions (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985) by being visible.

Setting goals and communicating those goals appeared in statements at both schools. Researchers such as Leithwood and Riehl (2003), Marzano et al. (2005), and Mendels (2012) detailed an effective instructional leader establishes buy-in through providing opportunities for teachers to participate in the development of school goals and building ownership. At Denistown, teachers indicated there was a shared vision developed with the principal. No such sentiments were shared from teachers at Bayside. Instead they noted that the instructional leader made changes mid-year

without explanation or support rather than collaborate to create a revised mission, however. The mid-year changes affected morale, as teachers want to feel supported and respected, rather than given mandates without support. Glatthorn et al. (2012) suggested developing people through taking an interest in teachers' work and providing support. With a lack of communication and shared vision mentioned by the teachers at Bayside, there is lack of trust for the instructional leaders at their school. The statements from the teachers at Bayside suggested that an instructional leader who builds positive relationships, sets a clear direction for their school and communicates effectively will have a positive impact at the school. Teachers noted they would like to see clear communication from the instructional leaders about expectations, explanations of changes, and support to make those changes.

### **Collaborating**

As the researcher, I assumed that the core practices of collaboration and curriculum would be most frequently mentioned. In particular, I expected to hear the participants discuss an effective instructional leader collaborating develops or redesigns curriculum, assessments, and instruction alongside teachers. The two core practices of collaboration and curriculum did not surface as often as topics referencing the core practice of motivation. While nearly a quarter of the horizontalized statements related to collaboration and curriculum, the textural statements reflected that the instructional leader made time and resources available for the teachers to work with one another for curriculum but did not engage in the work. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) noted the principal, as instructional leader, encourages teachers to work together which was referenced throughout the interviews. For example, teachers

referenced having time to develop and modify curriculum and common assessments with teachers of their department or through CPT. The participants did not note the instructional leader collaborates with teachers during CPT as suggested by Glatthorn et al. (2012).

Mr. Vieira at Bayside High School noted a small instance of the instructional leader collaborating with some teachers. He mentioned the instructional leader collaborates on a plan for struggling teachers: “You go [through] the process of helping that teacher get better. It’s up to administration to develop a plan that will help that teacher get better.”

### **Designing and Modifying Curriculum**

Glatthorn et al. (2012) discussed principals working with teachers to supervise and coordinate decisions within and between grade levels. In this study, it was not evident if the principal takes an active role in curricular work. Effective instructional leaders are expected have current knowledge in the redesigning and implementing strategies related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment to share with teachers (DuFour, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005; Stronge 2013). Yet the participants at both schools did not note the principals, as instructional leaders, take an active role in guiding the development of curriculum. However, there was evidence that the principals provided time for teachers to work together with fellow teachers from their respective subject areas to modify curriculum, as needed.

### **Providing Feedback to Teachers**

For all participants, the feedback tied to teacher evaluations needed to be meaningful. Teachers stated that the feedback should be specific to what was

observed and contain positive comments as referenced in the research of Blase and Blase (1998a) and Hallinger and Murphy (1985). For any teacher needing support, the feedback must provide detailed steps for improvement according to the participants. More specifically, the teachers noted meaningful feedback contains constructive criticism (Hallinger & Murphy 1985). Empty compliments and lack of clear expectations contributed to low morale at Bayside. This connected to their experiences with feedback not being meaningful through the evaluation system at Bayside High School.

### **Analyzing School and Student Data**

The core practice of analyzing school and student data (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008) was a topic that required prompting throughout the use of the semi-structured questions throughout the interviews. As a core practice, data analysis was mentioned in two ways: analysis of school-wide data with the leadership team and the analysis of the common assessment results. At both schools, the department chairs noted the leadership team collaboratively examined data to identify and discuss school-wide trends. There were discussions from the department chairs on using school-wide data to make informed decisions (Spiro, 2013) about student learning in relation to students completing a portfolio as a requirement for graduation. Additionally, the teachers at Denistown mentioned using student data to provide support for struggling twelfth-graders. While at Bayside, the department chairs noted there was discussion about school-wide data and the need to provide teachers with support, especially those that teach collaboratively within a classroom. Coming into this research, I anticipated the core practice of analyzing school and

student data to surface more often than it did. For example, I expected the participants would discuss professional development on learning how to analyze data to make determinations about student achievement individually and collectively with teachers or share ways they have been encouraged to use student data (Portin et al., 2009). At both schools, teachers mentioned analyzing common assessment data in collaboration with fellow teachers. At Bayside, teachers gave detailed examples of examining specific questions students struggled with as a basis for review and discussion.

### **Providing Professional Development**

There was evidence in the interviews of the instructional leader providing teachers with support through professional development. There was an element of modeling professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) at Denistown. The teachers at Denistown noted the principal sent teachers research articles, but did not offer specific professional development or create an opportunity to discuss the articles. I did not discover any evidence of modeling at Bayside. At Denistown, according to Mrs. Salvatore, the principal encouraged and promoted developing formative assessments across the building. The classroom teachers at Bayside, Mr. Archer and Mrs. Lavoie-Perez, made suggestions for instructional leaders to consider: offering differentiated professional development and having an instructional leader with some knowledge in the subject area for teacher evaluation. Glatthorn et al. (2012) referenced one approach to providing professional development is to identify teachers' needs and develop a differentiated system to address those needs. As noted in the core practice of data, the teachers at Bayside discussed the development of a professional

development opportunity especially for teachers who teach in a collaborative setting within a classroom.

In summary, the participants' experiences with an effective instructional leader mostly connected to building interpersonal relationships than involvement with other practices. Ultimately, the teachers in this study noted that the ways in which the instructional leader developed relationships and interacted with staff resonated with how they perceived effective instructional leadership.

### **Interpretation and Implications of the Study**

The lived experiences of the teacher participants of this study produced a composite textural-structural description, synthesizing their perspectives and experiences on the phenomenon of effective instructional leadership. There were many similarities in the structural themes among the participants' responses despite their unique, individual experiences that embodied the textural themes. Perspectives often overlapped and some similar experiences emerged at each school. The process of data analysis accounted for both the similarities and differences in their experiences. Then, I was able to identify an underlying structure of the essence and meanings of their experiences. The core essences from this study on motivating for change, communication, building interpersonal relationships, collaboration, and providing feedback, all align and extend the literature that currently exists in instructional leadership in education by connecting to the six core areas of effective instructional leadership of motivating for change, design and modify curriculum, provide professional development for staff, analyze school and student data,

collaboration, and providing meaningful feedback (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008).

### **Finding 1: Interpersonal Skills**

The structural theme of Interpersonal Skills emerged as most often with a host of textural themes to support it. When horizontalizing the relevant statements, this area brought the highest amount of statements by the participants. The effective instructional leader's ability to have strong interpersonal skills resonated with each teacher. While each school had three textural themes under the structural theme of interpersonal skills, two of the themes at each school differed slightly depending on the school. Visibility and trust were common textural themes. At Denistown, encouraging staff emerged as the other two textural themes under Interpersonal Skills while being supportive emerged at Bayside.

In examining the theme of visibility, teachers at each school thought informal classroom visits were a component of effective instructional leadership. Essential to building connections with staff and motivating them to commit to the school's mission is being visible and having informal interactions (Glatthorn et al., 2012; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Portin et al., 2009) with the staff. Throughout the interviews, the participants mentioned making an informal, or "pop-in," visit to encourage teachers to feel comfortable with the principal spending time in the classroom. At Denistown, the teachers noted the principal is present in the school building, usually walking in the hallways. While at Bayside, the teachers suggested the instructional leader spend time informally visiting the classrooms to increase visibility. Further, at Denistown, the instructional leader seeks to check the "pulse" of the school, as well. This "pulse"



relates to the principal being visible in the school, going into classrooms for informal visits, and being aware of what is occurring at the school. This varies slightly at Bayside, the “pulse” was noted as a strategy to obtain feedback from teachers and obtain a sense of what is happening at the school.

Trust had meaning for both sets of teachers. Building trust involves “having a credible track record of delivery of support and materials” (Aronson & DeBenedictis, 1988, p. 26). At Denistown, trust was built through dialogue and personal exchanges. Teachers noted the principal follows through with providing immediate feedback or support when needed. He has trust in the staff. At Bayside, however, there was an element of mistrust felt by the teachers and they shared negative experiences that were discovered in developing their textual descriptions. At Bayside, there were instances of the instructional leader changing course without an explanation, leaving the two classroom teachers, in particular, feeling negative about the style of communication.

Teachers at Bayside noted bullying behavior with their instructional leaders and the evaluation system has led to mistrust. One minute, telling teachers they are doing a great job, then giving them low scores on the evaluation has sent mixed messages. One department chair, Mr. Vieira, noted hearing an instructional leader state that the NECAP scores were low and thus expected the evaluation scores for teachers to be low and the need to address “the bad teachers.”

The two textual themes that differed at the two schools were “encouraging staff” versus “being supportive.” At Denistown, the teachers discussed feeling valued and appreciated through recognition: Feeling as though the instructional leader spent time recognizing the good efforts they made in school for students or the school itself

mattered. In an effort to motivate staff, an effective instructional leader provides recognition and praise for teachers' efforts, which has encouraged buy-in (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Marzano et al., 2005) according to teachers at Denistown High School. At both schools, there was discussion about communicating the opportunities for PD being offered and teachers having a say in the types of PD is offered. As a textural theme, encouraging teachers to seek out PD only emerged at Denistown. The instructional leader at Denistown provided the department chairs with training to implement the teacher evaluation system for their respective teachers. They highlighted other professional growth opportunities with designing curriculum, as well. In many instances, the teachers at Denistown expressed a need for growth in redesigning curriculum and were afforded the opportunity to seek that growth. The principal provided them with the support they needed (Glatthorn et al., 2012); in turn, this encouraged motivation and confidence within these teachers and respect for the principal (Blase & Blase, 1998a). This type of support for the department chairs was not noted at Bayside.

At Bayside, however, it was important to feel that the instructional leader supported them. With changes made on different levels with curriculum and mid-term assessments mandated by the principal, they felt their instructional leader was not supportive or respectful. Those negative instances have shaped their perspective and thus, they expressed the need for an effective instructional leader to be supportive of them.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) suggest having confidence in teachers' work and recognizing it. For example, writing a "thank-you" note or recognizing strengths

a teacher may possess, then asking her/him to lead a committee could suffice as increasing motivation among staff. Additionally, encouragement, for Denistown, connects to encouraging teachers to try something new whether it is a different instructional strategy or to attend a PD workshop thought to be useful. Denistown's teachers appreciated that their instructional leader acknowledged their work, encouraged them to take on new challenges, lead projects, and join committees. Encouraging teachers to "go for it" was expressed in each of the four interviews at Denistown. Aronson and DeBenedictis (1998) believe in granting teachers the necessary time and resources in an effort to be supportive.

## **Finding 2: Collaboration**

Similar textural themes were revealed regarding collaboration on curriculum at both high schools. The two core practices of curriculum and collaboration aligned tightly in both sets of interviews. There has been encouragement for staff to develop curricular standards and to make decisions regarding revising curriculum (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010) at Denistown. For example, revisions to curriculum were accomplished in collaboration with other teachers, as in the case of creating a scope and sequence or aligning the curriculum to CCSS at both schools. The teachers at Denistown shared that the instructional leader encouraged them to tackle revising curriculum and provided time for them to do so. At each school, there are opportunities for teachers to share student work, materials, and provide one another with feedback during department meetings, informal discussion, or CPT. The two classroom teachers at Bayside noted collaborating with their respective department chairs on adjusting curriculum and sharing materials. Yet, at neither school did the

teachers note that the instructional leader participated in collaborating with teachers to revise curriculum, assessment or instruction.

Part of effective instructional leadership is supporting the use of collaboration to motivate teachers to share ideas (Blase & Blase, 1998a; Lashway, 2002).

Developing and sharing common assessments along with analyzing them emerged in each of the interviews. The department chairs at Bayside, Mr. Vieira and Mr. Leet, noted differences in how they worked with common assessments. Mr. Leet thought the teachers of his department appreciated the development of common tasks as it “freed up time for teachers to spend” on being creative with instruction while Mr. Vieira noted the teachers in his department felt having common assessments “drowns out teacher creativity.” At both schools, teachers shared materials with peers of similar subjects and across subject areas through their CPT period.

For the six department chairs, collaboration within the leadership team is noteworthy. This strategy is at the heart of working with the principal since they are all members of the team. At Denistown, they positively discussed how valuable this team is to their role as department chairs. They shared positive experiences with collaborating to share new ideas, openly discuss and resolve issues, and be supportive of one another. This team felt they have a voice with the administration, and perhaps a more direct path to providing a voice than the teachers, according to Mrs. Mercer and Mrs. Koczan. The two department chairs from Bayside touched upon the subject primarily to discuss sharing feedback and ideas with the principal and to temper the leadership’s “wacky ideas” as part of the leadership team. At both schools, the department chairs collaborated to analyze school-wide data. For example, at Bayside,

the department chairs identified a need for providing some teachers a professional development workshop as a result of examining student data and identifying a need for those teachers (Blase & Blase, 1998a; Elmore, 1999; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Marzano et al., 2005; Spiro, 2013). For teachers who teach in a collaborative classroom (with at least one regular education teacher and one special education teacher), the leadership team noted that the students in collaborative classrooms had achievement gaps so the team created an opportunity to improve the teaching relationship to address the trends they identified in the data. Further, for teachers at both schools, an effective instructional leader supports collaboratively analyzing data from common assessments as a means to “provide opportunities for staff to participate in decision-making about issues that affect them” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 7).

### **Finding 3: Communication**

Communication is a basic element of the core practice of motivation. Hallinger and Murphy (1986) report that communication is essential to building relationships among staff. Among these teacher participants, they highlighted specific behaviors of communication that had meaning to them.

Communicating with staff through emails to share basic information was a common textual description elicited from each interview. At Denistown, teachers noted that the principal shared information about school events and helpful research articles for teachers to peruse. The principal modeled keeping up on current trends by sending these articles by promoting professional growth both for him and the staff (Stronge, 2013). The message conveyed at Bayside was that teachers did not like the conflicting messages they received about the positive work they have done for the

school and students in light of receiving low scores on their evaluations. For them, receiving a positive message one day then a negative one the next seemed disconnected and insincere.

All teachers wanted to be able to communicate with the instructional leader and expected an open line of communication by which to share feedback on school changes or ideas for improvement. Each teacher expressed the importance of an effective instructional leader listening to his/her ideas heard. At Denistown, the teachers noted there is an open climate of communication for teachers who would like to speak with the principal. Feedback is encouraged through the principal along with joining a committee to be a part of the school's shared vision as noted by Mrs. Mercer. Further, an effective instructional leader is willing to support what the teachers need (Glatthorn et al., 2012).

For Bayside High, the teachers wanted an explanation about changes, as opposed to receiving a directive to make changes without support or reasoning. All teachers wanted to be a part of the process for change and to share feedback. At Denistown, the department chairs noted the instructional leader conducts meetings for a clear purpose and provides explanations for changes. While at Bayside, it appeared that the classroom teachers were left out of the process for decision-making. For instance, they were unclear as to why a mid-year change was being mandated by the principal and yet were required to adjust their mid-year assessments with little guidance or support.

At both schools, there was discussion about communicating the opportunities for PD and voicing an opinion about what type of PD is offered. The participants

from Bayside noted that teachers do not have enough input into PD opportunities. Mr. Archer, at Bayside, suggested implementing a differentiated model of professional development so teachers may grow in areas appropriate to their subject area, which aligns to one of the four types of staff development Glatthorn, et al. (2012) mentioned. According to the teachers at Denistown High, an effective instructional leader is open to feedback on PD opportunities and encourages participation in workshops that interest teachers. At Bayside, the principal has made attempts to obtain the “pulse of the school” by asking teachers about what is happening and how they feel. Based on the interviews, it appears the intent of this principal may be to obtain feedback from teachers and build a connection. While at Denistown, the principal sought the “pulse” of the school through being visible throughout the building and being aware of what is happening at the school.

#### **Finding 4: Motivating for Change**

Similar textural themes from both sets of teachers were expressed throughout the interviews aligned to the research of Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) and Leithwood et al. (2008). The textural themes from Denistown High School contained many elements relating to communicating the school’s goals and having a shared mission as evidenced by the positive experiences noted by the teacher participants. As Glatthorn, et al. (2012) noted, “people will support what they help create” (p. 157). At Denistown, teachers noted being part of the development process of the shared mission through belonging to school improvement-type committees or sharing feedback with the principal. While at Bayside High School, the teachers did not address being part of the development of a shared vision, but rather mentioned

ensuring that school goals are communicated. Teachers at Bayside wanted to see the instructional leader be honest about the “big picture” as Mr. Archer noted. Mr. Leet supported that sentiment with the importance of articulating the end goal. They noted the need for flexibility and encouraging “buy-in” which differs from the “go for it” sentiments of Denistown. Bayside’s teachers revealed ways an effective instructional leader could obtain buy-in with the latest change efforts and be more flexible. Communicating an explanation for changes and providing support for those changes would improve and “sell” the change, according to Mr. Leet. It was noted that the administrators were inflexible with their interpretation of the rubrics for teacher evaluation and the mid-year changes with assessments thus creating low morale at Bayside. Ultimately, communicating the school’s goals was important to both parties of teachers for effective instructional leadership.

### **Finding 5: Feedback**

Each of the participants had a plethora of information to share on effective instructional leaders providing feedback to teachers at their schools. In the literature, feedback must be specific and nonjudgmental and offer constructive criticism to assist with improvement (Blase and Blase, 1998a; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). A commonality shared among all participants as a textural theme was providing teachers with valuable and meaningful feedback on their evaluations. Feedback that is tied to the scoring rubrics, contains positive comments, and, if necessary, contains detailed information related to support the teacher may be need. Teachers from both schools suggested providing honest feedback and staying close to the facts, as well as being nonjudgmental in presenting the feedback. For example, Mrs. Koczan, at Denistown,



stated not “making any judgments against someone’s negativity and turning that negative into a positive.” Mrs. Koczan and the teachers at Bayside High revealed that teachers perceive this model of evaluation as a “gotcha” model. Per Mrs. Koczan, the principal needs to “go out there and break that rumor, that stereotype.” The teachers at Bayside believed the instructional leaders capture only one classroom observation as a reflection of a teacher’s performance; hence, they felt the system does indeed have a “gotcha” feel. It was suggested that the instructional leaders spend more time informally visiting classrooms to get a better sense of the teaching occurring and show that they are “taking interest” per Mr. Archer.

### **Limitations**

This qualitative study may have limitations since only a small number of participants were interviewed at two high schools. Further, the data from these participants will not be generalizable since the participants are from two urban-ring school districts in Rhode Island; therefore the context of their experiences will be limited to their particular experiences of the phenomenon. Another limitation is the participants’ ability to recall, reflect, and articulate their experiences with effective instructional leadership during the in-depth interviews.

Additionally, the method of obtaining participants was limited. I was unable to present the research study to the entire faculty of teachers in order to obtain participants. I was unable to ensure the flyer (see Appendix B) was sent to all teachers at both schools, as well. Six of the eight teacher participants hold the position of department chair and members of a leadership team with the instructional leader, which provides a unique view of administration as they have the most direct contact

with the school's leadership. It is noteworthy that the two classroom teachers have had less direct contact and experiences with the principal than the department chairs. The data I collected is not quantitative; hence, other researchers may have a difficult time utilizing my data into their studies.

### **Implications for Instructional Leadership**

The first implication of this study for the field of instructional leadership is a confirmation of the core practices highlighted in the research of Darling-Hammond et al. (2010), Leithwood et al. (2008), and Glatthorn et al. (2012). The textural and structural themes of the teacher participants' experiences connect to the six core practices of effective instructional leadership: motivating for change, designing and modifying curriculum, providing professional development, analyzing school and student data, collaboration, and providing meaningful feedback (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). The teachers' perspectives and lived experiences with administrators shape their sense-making and understanding of effective instructional leadership. Therefore, they shared what they knew to be true and what was of importance to them: behaviors related to motivation. The core practice of motivation emerged as a major core essence throughout the interviews. The teachers' references to setting shared school goals, communication, building interpersonal relationships, encouraging, building trust and respect, recognizing teachers' work, and being supportive, flexible and visible complement the research on the practice of motivation with Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) and Leithwood et al. (2008).

Moreover, each of the structural themes that emerged in this study relate to making personal connections. The specific core practice of motivation aligns and

supports each of the other core practices and the structural themes noted in this study. The relationship and interactions of teachers with their instructional leader exist as textural themes within each of the structural themes. The major structural themes from this study of setting school goals, presentation of communication with staff, collaboration, providing feedback, and creating professional development opportunities each relate to building relationships. For this group of research participants, an effective instructional leader engages in each of the behaviors noted in the research for building interpersonal skills under the core practice of motivation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008).

Hence, the second implication is extending and confirming the research on effective instructional leadership. From this research, readers will make the connection between this study's findings and the current research on effective instructional leadership. Readers may be surprised, as I was, to discover that what mattered most to the participants was making personal connection with teachers. This study magnifies the importance of interpersonal relationships for these teacher participants. Consequently, reading this study will confirm the research on effective instructional leadership and provide future readers with the perspective of these eight teachers and how they articulated their perceptions and experiences with the phenomenon.

Lastly, the research in this study could be utilized for students of educational leadership and program directors of leadership certification programs in Rhode Island, in addition to the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). The themes presented showcase what eight teachers observed and experienced representing some

of the current initiatives being promoted in the state of Rhode Island. Therefore, referencing current research and supporting it with this qualitative study may enhance understanding of the core instructional practices and how to employ them in a local school or any other school implementing similar initiatives with CCSS, common assessments, and evaluation. For local students of educational leadership interested in leading a secondary school in Rhode Island, this study may help them gain a deeper understanding of the actual goings-on at two high schools. The participants' experiences may be utilized in future research relevant to instructional leaders' behaviors and capacity for instructional leadership. This study may be useful for district-level administrators to develop effective instructional leaders by “communicating explicit expectations for principal leadership and providing learning experiences in line with those expectations” (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010, p. 21). Colleges and universities may find the work of this study useful for developing or revising programs for principal training at the secondary level. Additionally, aspiring and current principals may use this study as a frame for establishing their personal philosophy of education in leading a school. My hope is for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to thoughtfully consider actual instructional leadership practices from the experiences of teachers in schools and the implications of those practices for school improvement.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The study of the effectiveness of instructional leadership can branch off into a myriad of directions. In Rhode Island, the typical teacher receives direction or leadership potentially from a department chair, building-level and district-level

administrators, through to the commissioner of education. Studying the relationship between any two of these layers of interconnected branches of education could enhance their communication thus implementing better educational practices at the classroom level.

While my study focused generally on the connection between teachers and the building-level instructional leaders, principals, another study could determine how department chairs can become better instructional leaders. Department chairs are seemingly the middle managers of the school. They take direction from the principals to implement new changes within their department. The focus of this study would include the six core components of effective instructional leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). This study could set the stage for a new precedent in education.

Since the department chairs need to essentially exhibit the qualities necessary to become an effective principal, perhaps the role of department chair could become a prominent stepping-stone en route to administration. This concept paves the way to another research avenue, how to best utilize the time of school principals. Due to the Rhode Island's teacher evaluation system, and if we are developing instructional leaders at the department chair level, perhaps a principal's time would be better served giving instruction and delegating authority to their department chairs rather than trying to micromanage the daily operations within a school. This study would have the quantitative element of analyzing a principal's time being spent with various levels of faculty specifically with relation to teaching and learning initiatives such as evaluation, curriculum, assessment, and instruction. Additionally, this study would

include qualitative components of determining which activities are more effective to engage in along with interviews from a set of principals detailing their experiences with how they spend their time on the current initiatives.

Many outside of education do not have a solid understanding of what the principal-superintendent relationship entails. A researcher may want to determine if the foundations of a good instructional leader are also required of a superintendent. This study could go a step further and compare a superintendent, who has minimal contact and visibility with students, to the CEO of a corporation. The CEO concept can also be delineated to the Rhode Island Commissioner of Education and RIDE. Does the Commissioner of Education require the same instructional leadership tools that a department chair has?

Any relationship within the educational community can be examined and researched. Education as a whole will benefit when any one of those communication links is nourished and enhanced. Researchers have an array of opportunities to strengthen the lines of communication within education. Researchers could also look at the duties and tasks performed by leaders in education and determine if each item is the best way to utilize that person's time. Education is changing due to Common Core State Standards and it is creating some exciting research opportunities upon which to capitalize. Whenever a new system is implemented it creates some waste and strain in the processes that researchers can analyze and correct.

### **Impact on the Researcher**

Interpersonal skills are the cornerstone for the teacher participants' experiences with effective instructional leaders in this study. The three textural themes of

visibility, encouraging staff or supporting staff, and trust and respect emerged most often throughout the interviews. The teacher participants made meaning of effective instructional leadership primarily through these topics. This concept linked into all other core essences for this group of teachers. Collaboration with one another, communication, motivating for change, and providing feedback to teachers require elements of interpersonal interactions, as well. These teachers identified an effective instructional leader as one to provide them with support, interact with and listen to them, be visible, provide useful and meaningful feedback, and create opportunities for collaboration. The textural themes of being supported emerged through various types of interaction such as visibility, trust in the teacher's abilities, and listening to the teacher's ideas/feedback. Ultimately, for the teachers at both schools, interpersonal skills were the foundation upon which effective leadership is built.

**Researcher reflection.** I began the interviews thinking teachers would discuss behaviors of an effective instructional leader related to teaching and learning. I thought there would be mention of experiences with the instructional leader participating in professional development or development of curriculum, discussions on assessment and instruction, and analyze data with teachers. In other words, I expected to hear about the effective instructional leader taking an active role in these core practices of instructional leadership (Glatthorn et al., 2012).

I began to see teachers highlight making personal connections with the instructional leader as a core essence early on, but did not allow this to sway my interviews. As part of Epoche, I noted this was something I saw early in the interviews. While I wanted to ask teachers about this specifically, I expressed these

thoughts through Epoche, instead of directly asking about how this is viewed as part of effective instructional leadership. To keep my biases out of the interview questions, I maintained focus by using an Interview Guide (see Appendix E). I was sure to not provide any personal responses to the open-ended questions, instead asking for more detail or how something came to be from the teachers' perspectives.

My opinions of the core practices for effective instructional leadership were key to the development of this study. I was flummoxed early in the interviews to see that teachers made comments connected to interpersonal relationships without any prompting. In order to obtain information on core practices, I had to ask the semi-structured, open-ended questions. In many instances, the core practices were mentioned after I prompted them. For example, the core practice of data analysis emerged in the interviews only with prompting. Lack of detail in discussion curriculum, professional development, and data surprised me. I anticipated learning about more examples of the principal, as the instructional leader, collaborating with teachers outside of the leadership team. The teachers of whom I interviewed may not have had these experiences; therefore, they would not have had details to share of such instances.

In this study, with these eight teachers, I realized teachers who hold the position of department chair have more direct experience(s) with the instructional leader of a school than teachers who are not department chairs. Yet, the number of comments about interpersonal relationships amongst department chairs and non-department chairs was similar.



It was challenging to keep from responding to statements teachers made. For instance, I wanted to ask pointed questions to one teacher who noted the teachers in her department did not use data often. Similarly, when another teacher noted that the teachers in his department were not supportive of having to create common assessments, I wanted to ask, “Why?”

I learned that building relationships matter. It is an underlying feature of working with other people. I surmised that the relationships teachers have with instructional leaders may have an impact on how effective they believe the leaders to be. Capturing the core essence of interpersonal relationships has confirmed this to be meaningful to each of the eight high school teachers interviewed. Further, building a positive relationship with teachers may have an impact on how motivated teachers may be to buy into a change effort or new initiative.

With this study, I reflected on my practice of being an instructional leader. In my position as assistant principal of an urban-ring middle school, I have pondered the ways in which this study has lead me to wonder about my efforts to improve teaching and learning at the school. More so than ever, during this school year, I have worked with each teacher during their Common Planning Time to analyze student data, collaborate on instructional strategies such as formative assessments and questioning techniques, and begun providing professional development on differentiated instruction. Thus, I have learned that the time I spend with teachers, being visible in classrooms or out in the hallways throughout the day, taking time to build trust and provide support, and listening may have an impact on how well new initiatives I introduce take hold at the school. I have learned to maintain openness to teacher

feedback. Teachers are interested in sharing their work and ideas with their school leaders; hence, it is necessary to embed time for teachers to approach the school leaders. Lastly, providing teachers with opportunities to collaborate is important and thus leads me to believe establishing relationships with the instructional leader may be as important, if not more, as developing relationships with fellow teachers.

### **Conclusion**

The study of effective instructional leadership in education is essential for continued, meaningful, and practical school improvement. The results of this phenomenological study on the meaning of effective instructional leadership contribute to the extensive field of instructional leadership. With a particular focus on the building of interpersonal relationships as a means to enhance instructional leadership, this study will provide a unique contribution to the existing research. Furthermore, based on the teachers' lived experiences, their understandings and meanings of instructional leadership will contribute specifically to research on the core elements of effective instructional leadership. It is my hope that this study sheds light on how instructional leadership is experienced by certain teachers by giving their perspective a voice and for current and future instructional leaders to learn how to best implement essential practices for effective instructional leadership while in the trenches of these high schools.

## APPENDICES

### **Appendix A:**

#### **Letter for High School Principal**

November 25, 2013  
XXXX

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Principal X:

My name is Cheri Guerra and I am a doctoral student at University of Rhode Island. I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your school, Bayside High School. I am currently enrolled in the Ph.D. program in Education and am in the process of writing a dissertation thesis. I am conducting a qualitative research study on teachers' experiences with instructional leadership. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of teachers' views and lived experiences with school leaders demonstrating instructional leadership practices.

I would appreciate if you will allow me to recruit 4-5 teachers from the school to participate in the study. Interested teachers, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed and returned to me, the researcher, prior to being interviewed.

If approval is granted, each teacher participant and I will meet briefly to complete a short form for collecting demographic data and review the informed consent process. Then we will discuss a suitable time and place to conduct the interview. All interview data collected from teachers will be included in the thesis. Individual results from this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. No costs will be incurred by either your school or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at my email address [cguerra28@gmail.com](mailto:cguerra28@gmail.com) or by phone, 401-230-8471.

If you agree, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this survey/study at your institution.

Sincerely,

Cheri Guerra  
Enclosures

cc: Dr. Peter Adamy

## Appendix B:

### Flyer for Teachers Describing Research and Seeking Volunteers

#### RESEARCH STUDY

A URI Graduate School student seeks to have teachers to participate in a research study in January 2014.

The goal of this study is to learn about teachers' experiences with school leaders demonstrating instructional leadership practices.

#### Criteria for Selection:

- ☆ Teachers of core subject areas with 8 or more years of teaching experience
- ☆ Willingness to participate in the study

#### Expectations for Participation:

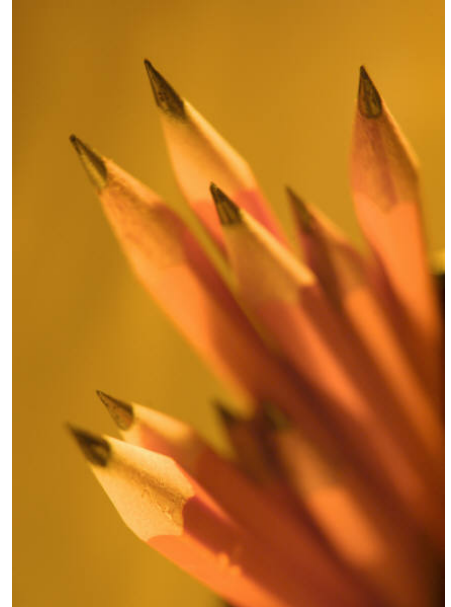
- ☆ A 10-minute meeting to discuss your participation in the study, informed consent, and complete a short form
- ☆ A 45-minute to 1-hour interview for you to share your experiences with instructional school leadership. You will be asked a series of questions about your experiences.
- ☆ Review the summary of your interview to ensure your experiences were portrayed accurately. This exchange will occur through email, unless otherwise requested by participant.
- ☆ Participation may include a second interview lasting approximately 30-45 minutes to gather additional information.
- ☆ Each participant will be compensated with a \$30 gift card to Dunkin Donuts.

**Additional Notes:** All of your demographic and personal information and interview responses will be kept confidential. The researcher will not share your individual responses with anyone other than the dissertation committee.

Your participation in this study will highlight the instructional leadership practices that have taken place in Rhode Island. The results will contribute toward educational leadership research at the secondary school level. Further, the research will provide school principals, school-district administrators, and policymakers with teachers' experiences of instructional practices being implemented in schools.

**If you are interested in participating in the study, please contact either the Student Researcher, Cheri Guerra ([cguerra28@gmail.com](mailto:cguerra28@gmail.com) or 401-230-8471), or the Primary Investigator, Dr. Peter Adamy ([adamy@uri.edu](mailto:adamy@uri.edu) or 401-874-7036).**

Thank you for your consideration.



## **Appendix C:**

### **Email to Teachers to Elicit Participation**

Hi XX,

I am working on a research project at URI on instructional leadership and seeking to work with you as you are a well-respected teacher at Bayside High School with 8 or more years of teaching experience in a core subject area.

All I require is an hour of your time for an interview in which we discuss your experiences with instructional leadership. If you agree to participate, your interview responses and participation will be kept confidential and all identifying information will be removed.

Please see the attached flyer, which outlines the expectations for being a participant in this study. Please let me know if you are interested in working with me. I could meet you at school during your free time in the next week or so.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Cheri Guerra

401-230-8471

## **Appendix D:**

### **Informed Consent**

The University of Rhode Island  
School of Education  
College of Human Sciences and Services  
Chafee Building  
142 Flagg Road  
Kingston, RI 02881

*A Study of Teachers' Experiences of the Phenomenon of Effective Instructional Leadership*

### **CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH**

You have been invited to take part in a research project described below. My name is Cheri Guerra, a doctoral student at University of Rhode Island. As the researcher, I will explain the project to you in detail. You should feel free to ask questions. If you have more questions later, Dr. Peter Adamy, the person mainly responsible for this study, (401) 874-7036, will discuss them with you. You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

#### *Description of the project:*

I am conducting a qualitative research study on teachers' experiences with instructional leadership. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of teachers' views and lived experiences with school leaders demonstrating instructional leadership practices.

#### *What will be done:*

Your participation in this study will consist of an information-gathering 10-minute meeting to discuss the purpose of your participation in the study and to establish a time and place to meet for the first interview at your school. You will be interviewed for approximately one hour about your experiences with instructional school leadership at a time and location we mutually agree upon. Next, you will be asked to read a summary of your interview to ensure your experiences were portrayed accurately. This exchange will be conducted through email, unless otherwise requested by participant. Participation may include a second interview lasting approximately 30-45 minutes to gather additional information, at a time and location we mutually agree upon. The interview(s) will be recorded via Apple iPod Touch. Each participant will be compensated with a \$30 gift card to Dunkin Donut.

#### *Risks or discomfort:*

There is minimal risk associated with participating in the study. All of your information and interview responses will be kept confidential. The researcher will not share your individual responses with anyone other than the dissertation committee.

Though direct quotes from you may be used in the study, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

*Benefits of this study:*

The benefit of your participation is to contribute research on instructional leadership. This study may assist school principals, school-district administrators, and policy makers with research on instructional leadership. There is minimal risk associated with participating in the study.

*Confidentiality:*

Your part in this study is confidential. None of the information will identify you by name. All of your information and interview responses will be kept confidential. The researcher will not share your individual responses with anyone other than the dissertation committee. The interview will be recorded via Apple iPod Touch; however, your name will not be recorded on the file. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the study, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

*Decision to quit at any time:*

The decision to take part in this study is up to you. You will be asked a series of questions about your experiences with educational leadership. You are not required to answer the questions and may pass on any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At any time you may notify Dr. Peter Adamy, (401) 874-7036, if you would like to stop your participation in the study. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation.

*Rights and Complaints:*

If you are not satisfied with the way this study is performed, you may discuss your complaints with Dr. Peter Adamy, (401) 874-7036, anonymously, if you choose. In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the office of the Vice President for Research, 70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island, telephone: (401) 874-4328.

1. You have read the Consent Form. Your questions have been answered. Your signature on this form means that you understand the information and you agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Typed/printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Typed/printed name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

2. Your signature below indicates you agree to have your interview(s) recorded using an electronic audio recording device, such as an Apple iPod.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

***Please sign both consent forms, keep one copy.***



## **Appendix E:**

### **Sample Semi-Structured Interview Question Guide**

- What is an effective school principal in your view?
- Describe the characteristics of an effective instructional leader.
- Could you relay a story in which you, firsthand, experienced working with an effective principal? How did you conclude s/he was effective? What behaviors and/or characteristics did you see that made you think s/he was effective?
- In what ways do effective principals work with curriculum? Elaborate on your explanation.
- How would you describe an effective instructional leader in connection with the teacher evaluation system?
- Discuss in detail your experiences working with an instructional leader you thought was effective? Why was s/he effective?
- Share the characteristics you feel describe an effective leader with relation to leadership.

## **Appendix F:**

### **Thank You Letter Requesting Validation of Results**

Hi Ms. Koczan,

Hope all is well and you have relaxing, fun events planned for your February vacation. Once again, thank you for participating in my study. I know it's been some time, but I have finally compared and contrasted the interviews of all my participants.

Attached is a document that captures the highlights from your interview.

Please let me know if there is anything you'd like to add, I'd be happy to add it to my data set.

One question for you: *In what ways do you believe "communication" from the effective instructional leader is important?*

Thank you again,

Cheri Guerra

## Appendix G:

### Demographic Data

*Please complete the form below to share information about your background and historical experiences as a teacher. Completing this form will provide the researcher with general information about you as a participant.*

Participant Name:

---

1. How many years have you been teaching?

---

2. How many years have you been teaching in this school?

---

3. Which subject area(s) do you currently teach?

---

4. How many principals have you worked for?

---

5. Have you chaired or co-chaired any committees? If so, which committees?

---

6. Are you a department chair? If so, how many years have you served as department chair?

---

Student Researcher: Cheri Guerra ([cguerra28@gmail.com](mailto:cguerra28@gmail.com) or cell: 401-230-8471)

Primary Investigator: Dr. Peter Adamy ([adamy@uri.edu](mailto:adamy@uri.edu) or office phone: 401-874-7036)

## **Appendix H:**

### **Composite Textural-Structural Description of the Two High Schools**

#### **Denistown High School**

##### **Structural Theme 1: Interpersonal Skills**

- Textural Theme 1a: Visibility
- Textural Theme 1b: Encouraging Staff
- Textural Theme 1c: Trust and Respect

##### **Structural Theme 2: Collaboration**

- Textural Theme 2a: Collaboration with Curriculum
- Textural Theme 2b: Collaboration via Shared Leadership:
- Textural Theme 2c: Data Analysis
- Textural Theme 2d: Sharing Ideas, Feedback, and Materials

##### **Structural Theme 3: Communication**

- Textural Theme 3a: Information Sharing
- Textural Theme 3b: Open Climate for Communication

##### **Structural Theme 4: Motivating for Change**

- Textural Theme 4a: School Goals, Shared Vision, Shared Mission

##### **Structural Theme 5: Feedback**

- Textural Theme 5a: Meaningful Feedback

#### **Bayside High School**

##### **Structural Theme 1: Interpersonal Skills**

- Textural Theme 1a: Visibility
- Textural Theme 1b: Trust and Respect
- Textural Theme 1c: Be Supportive

##### **Structural Theme 2: Collaboration**

- Textural Theme 2a: Collaboration with Curriculum
- Textural Theme 2b: Sharing Ideas, Feedback, and Materials

##### **Structural Theme 3: Communication**

- Textural Theme 3a: Information Sharing
- Textural Theme 3b: Open Climate for Communication
- Textural Theme 3c: Give Teachers a Voice
- Textural Theme 3d: Pulse of the School

##### **Structural Theme 4: Motivating for Change**

- Textural Theme 4a: School Goals, Shared Vision, Shared Mission

##### **Structural Theme 5: Feedback**

- Textural Theme 5a: Meaningful Feedback

## **Appendix I:**

### **Examples of Bracketing the Topic**

At the start of each interview, I stated the following: The purpose of this interview is to learn about your experiences with instructional leadership, your understanding of effective school instructional leadership. My goal is to give voice to teachers' perspective by listening to personal experiences. My study will focus on teachers' explanations and experiences to make meaning of effective instructional leadership. From your perspective, describe an effective instructional leader.

### **Prior to Interview Four**

"Teachers needed prompting with the core practices with semi-structured questions. Too open-ended? Mrs. Matthews has a degree in Ed Leadership yet still needed prompting with the core practices. In preparing for Interview Four, am I assuming too much regarding asking teachers to be able to discuss effective instructional leadership on their own? What do they know with relation to the core practices?"

### **Prior to Interview Five**

"I'm not sure what to expect with a fifth participant being a department chair. As a department chair, does this person have an Ed Leadership degree? If they have had instructional leadership experience, how will that shape their interview? Will s/he be as forthcoming as previous research participants with sharing experiences? My biases: this teacher could be very positive or negative toward the school's instructional leader. Interpersonal relationships have emerged as a major theme thus far, it is my goal to

not guide him/her toward informing me about this. Interviews need to be open-ended. Need to hear his/her version of what it means to be effective as an instructional leader. Therefore, I will be sure to refrain from directly mentioning the skills that align with the practice of building interpersonal skills.”

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